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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides a toolbox of practical resources to help in developing media literacy skills to reduce the amount of media violence people are exposed to in their homes and communities. This overview accompanies a series designed for different age groups and grade levels. The leader's guide provides strategies for increasing contact with the community, instructions for conducting a town-hall discussion group on media violence, and handouts for use in the seminar. Handouts include: (1) "The Circle of Blame"; (2) "There Is a Difference"; (3) "Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence"; (4) "The Six Myths of Media Violence"; (5) "Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home" and "Siete consejos para ver TV en casa" (Handout #5 in Spanish); (6) "What Everyone Should Know about Media: Five Core Concepts"; (7) "Empowerment Spiral"; (8) "Eight Steps to Success: How to Write To the Media/Media Addresses"; and (9) "Challenging the Media Is Everyone's Responsibility." (EH)

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INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Beyond Blame

CHALLENGING VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

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TOWN HALL PRESENTATION

&

BACKGROUND READINGS

SO 026 169

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Beyond Blame

CHALLENGING VIOLENCE
IN THE MEDIA

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW
WITH
'TOWN HALL' PRESENTATION

LEADER'S GUIDE

A

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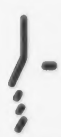

CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY

CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY

WHO WE ARE

The Center for Media Literacy is dedicated to a new vision of literacy for the 21st Century: the ability to *communicate* competently in all media, print and electronic, as well as to *access, analyze* and *evaluate* the powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture. These skills of *media literacy* are essential for our future as individuals and as members of a democratic society.

Established in 1989 as an expansion of the acclaimed quarterly magazine, *Media&Values*, the Center now serves a growing membership network of parents, teachers, childcare providers, religious and community leaders. The Center is the largest producer and distributor of media literacy resources in North America.

OUR MISSION

We believe that mass media is the dominant influence in children's lives today. Our mission is to help children— and adults — prepare for living and learning in a global media culture by translating media literacy research and theory into practical information, training and educational tools for teachers and youth leaders, parents and caregivers of children.

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Beyond Blame

Challenging Violence In the Media

Congratulations! The package you are holding is a toolbox for change. It contains powerful educational resources to help you better understand the issues in the media violence debate, as well as to explore with others what can be done individually and collectively to resolve a societal issue which has become so troubling in recent years.

Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media is the latest in a series of media literacy curriculum resources published by the Center for Media Literacy, the nation's largest producer and distributor of media education materials.

Carefully researched and creatively assembled by a team of writers, editors, teachers and researchers over 18 months, this toolbox contains a unique collection of practical resources, including outlines for classes or sessions for all ages; video segments to analyze and evaluate; copy-ready handouts and worksheets plus dozens of action ideas to help individuals and families integrate the skills of media literacy into their lives.

These media literacy skills can help us all reduce the amount of media violence we are exposed to in our homes and communities. Just as important, they can prepare us to participate actively as citizens in the public discussions that shape policies about media, and media violence, in our world.

While we know media violence does not cause all viewers to become violent (or we would all be murderers!), we can say that media reinforce the myths and images, beliefs and attitudes of a culture of violence. They are a *messenger for violence as a way of life.*

Even if we don't become more aggressive ourselves, we are all affected by the way others behave toward us. And by seeing violence over and over, we also learn to accept and tolerate violence as "the way things are."

We will never totally eradicate violence from our lives or the media. That is unrealistic. As long as there are human beings, there will be violence among some of them.

But enough questions present themselves about the cumulative impact from prolonged exposure to *violent imagery* in entertainment — television, movies, video games, music and even advertising — that the Center for Media Literacy believes we must, as a society, carefully examine and evaluate what's going on in our media-dominant culture.

This toolbox provides you with the means to begin that examination. It can be used in schools, community centers, libraries, citizen groups, churches and synagogues. It will spark discussions, provoke debates, fill in missing information, open up new ideas, challenge myths and promote critical thinking about something we seldom think about — the millions of media messages that bombard us daily.

What the *Beyond Blame* program does *not* do is prescribe a single "cure" for the problem of media violence. There is no one solution. There are simply many solutions which each of us must consider in our own individual way. And, as in so many other social movements, it is the accumulation of small, individual actions that add up to create an unstoppable force of public opinion. "I'm willing to be a pebble," says the poster at my nearby Ben & Jerry's store, "if I'm also part of an avalanche."

For 40 years, we have been engaged in a "circle of blame" about media violence that has gotten us nowhere: audiences blaming writers, writers blaming producers, producers blaming the networks, networks blaming the advertisers and advertisers blaming the public.

It's time to engage people all across the land in a learning process that leads from awareness to action, from passivity to engagement, from denial to acceptance of responsibility. It's time to move beyond blame.

Let the avalanche begin.

Elizabeth Thoman

Elizabeth Thoman
Founder and Executive Director
Center for Media Literacy

Components of the *Beyond Blame* Program

Introduction with Town Hall Presentation
Guide A (the book you are holding) contains valuable introductory material with essential background and reading for successfully conducting the age-specific lessons in the accompanying packages.

The second half of this guide is a comprehensive outline for a 90-minute "town hall" gathering of parents, teachers and community leaders. It can also be used for a teacher in-service program or as an introductory self-study. Ready-to-copy masters for a take-home handout package are included, as well as video segments for use in the presentation.

Leader's Guides
The *Beyond Blame* resource program includes four age-specific Leader's or Teacher's Guides with core lesson plans, or group session outlines, for:

- *Elementary Level (grades 4-5)* — *Guide B*
- *Middle School Level (grades 6-8)* — *Guide C*
- *Teen/Adult Level (grade 10 - Adult)* — *Guide D*
- *Parents and Caregivers of Young Children* — *Guide E*

The sessions incorporate key principles of media literacy education and are developed using a discovery method for group learning. Complete information about conducting the sessions can be found in the introductory pages of each Guide.

Worksheet and Handout Masters
An illustrated collection of ready-to-copy worksheet or handout masters to accompany the lessons is included at the back of each guide. Each is numbered and marked A, B, C, D or E to correspond with its Guide. Reprint permission for using these copyrighted handouts in ordinary classes or groups is included in the purchase of *Beyond Blame*. Reproduction of handouts in large quantity or for widespread distribution requires a royalty payment to the Center for Media Literacy. (See Reprint Permission Guidelines in each Leader's Guide.)

Video Tapes
A collection of VHS video segments to accompany many of the session plans is provided. Each video is marked A, B, C, D, or E for easy identification. Within each video, individual segments are numbered to correspond with citations in the Leader's Guides.

Media&Values *magazines*
The two-part series of *Media&Values* magazine on "Media and Violence" provides key background reading for teachers or leaders in preparation for each session. Acclaimed as a comprehensive "short course" on all aspects of the media/violence issue, you'll find the magazines will become an indispensible (and well-marked) resource. Summaries of the articles in the two issues can be found on pages 16-18.

Photocopying — Quantity photocopying of articles from the magazines is not permitted by copyright. Permission is extended to photocopy only the two-page, "tear-out," Reflection Resource at the back of each issue where recommended in the *Beyond Blame* Leader's Guides.

Additional Copies — High school or college teachers, and adult or parent group leaders, may wish to purchase copies of the two magazines for each class participant. Additional or quantity copies of either or both of the magazines are available for low-cost purchase from the Center for Media Literacy: 1-800-226-9494.

"Issues and Answers: A Conversation about Media Violence"
In this 55-minute audiotape, Matt Wright, a host of "AirTalk" on NPR affiliate, KPCC in Pasadena, CA interviews the founder and executive director of the Center for Media Literacy, Elizabeth Thoman, on major concepts developed in the *Beyond Blame* materials. Their lively conversation provides valuable background for teachers and leaders, along with key words and explanations you'll pick up to share with your group or class.

Themes/Concepts

The complete *Beyond Blame* program contains resources to explore more than a dozen themes related to media violence. The chart below details them and outlines the lesson plan in which each is covered. These themes can be further grouped in three ways:

Basic Questions — At all age levels, participants first explore fundamental information about violence in the media. Lesson plans allow each group to develop age-appropriate definitions of media violence, compare media violence with real-life violence (and its consequences), learn "The Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence" identified by psychologists, and analyze production techniques that make violence a standard part of entertainment.

Deeper Issues — Older teens and adults explore some of the deeper issues of violence in the news and in sports, as well as the danger of mixing violence and sex in rock videos, movies, ads and video games.

Action and Advocacy — Action-oriented sessions provide groups and individuals with age-appropriate activities to reduce exposure to violence and to challenge the increasing use of violence in media today. Parents learn the pros and cons of the ratings systems; kids create "true hero" trading cards; teens "follow the money" in an economic role play. Throughout all sessions and lessons, participants are urged to follow up their learning with a variety of actions, from letter-writing to producing alternative nonviolent media messages.

Thinking Skills and Media Literacy Principles

All lesson or session plans incorporate a variety of learning skills from critical thinking to creative problem-solving — even math skills. Each lesson also incorporates one or more of the five core principles of media literacy education:

1. ***All media are constructions.***
2. ***Media use unique "languages."***
3. ***Audiences "negotiate meaning."***
4. ***Media have commercial interests.***
5. ***Media have embedded values and points of view.***

You'll learn more about these principles in the introductory pages of each Leader's Guide and in Handout #6 on page 43 of this guide.

Key Themes/Concepts of the *Beyond Blame* Program

		Introduction	Elementary	Middle School	Teen/Adult	Parent/ Caregiver
Basic Questions	What is media violence? Defining and categorizing.	✓	1	1	2	1
	Real violence vs. media violence: The missing consequences.		2	2		
	Why do we watch? Exploring "jolts-per-minute."		3	2		1
	How much do we see? Becoming aware.	✓	5	5	1	1, 2
	Heroes and heroines: Challenging violent role models.		7	4	6	3
	Alternatives to violence: Imaging nonviolent solutions to conflict.		4	3	6	
	Is media violence harmful? "Four Effects of Viewing Violence."	✓	6	6	1	2
Deeper Issues	Violence in local news: "If it bleeds, it leads."				3	
	Violence in sports: Competition gone awry?				4	
	Violence, sex and MTV: Messages about women and men.				5	
Action and Advocacy	Movie ratings: Making informed entertainment choices.					4
	Challenging "The Six Myths of Media Violence."	✓				5
	Exploring social responsibility for media violence.	✓		7	7	
	Reducing media violence at home.	✓	8	8		6
	Reducing media violence: organizing for action.	✓	8	8	7	6,7

How To Organize and Publicize The *Beyond Blame* Program In Your Community

Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media is a multi-media learning program to empower all ages in your community, from elementary students through senior citizens.

It provides a perfect opportunity for collaboration among all community groups from schools and churches to civic and service organizations. Few can deny the need for education on this topic; everyone is looking for resources and assistance in organizing for action.

To break the circle of blame, millions of people must become more aware and involved. Here's a valuable way to begin!

The first step is to select a Leadership Team of two or three teachers, some parents, clergy and other community leaders who can become familiar with the resources in the *Beyond Blame* program in order to 1) assist in implementing a strategy for your school and community, and 2) organize a "Town Hall" Presentation. Additional activities will flow once the program begins.

The "Town Hall" Presentation

A 90-minute overview presentation, included at the end of this guide, is the basis for a "Town Hall" event where leaders in your community join teachers and concerned parents to challenge violence in the media. The presentation, including video clips and handouts, will give everyone a clear sense of what you hope to accomplish by employing the *Beyond Blame* program.

It will also provide a "common body of knowledge" for everyone on this issue, as well as generate enthusiasm that will, in turn, produce some coverage of your activities by local newspapers and broadcasters.

In addition to outlining the plans for use of the program in your schools, churches and community groups, you will also want to be sure to give parents an opportunity to sign up for the seven-session *Parent/Caregiver Program*, or for individual topical programs, from a calendar of scheduled one-time sessions.

If organized carefully — and promoted properly — your Town Hall event should get you moving ahead with widespread interest and attention.

Whom to Invite to the "Town Hall" Event

Start with the Mayor, the City Council, the School Board, clergy, the District Attorney, other elected officials, and, of course, your local newspapers and broadcasters.

Information should go out to all the parent/teacher organization presidents, civic organizations and any ecumenical council of churches group, asking them to spread the word and put notices in their bulletins and newsletters.

Public service announcements and press releases inviting the general public should be distributed at least one month in advance of the meeting, with a note or telephone follow-up two weeks before the scheduled event. Here are a few key points you will want to stress in these announcements:

1. The multi-media violence education and prevention program you are employing, *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*, is being used across the nation as a catalyst to inspire sustained community efforts for reducing exposure to media violence.

2. The resources used in this educational program — with classes and workshops for all age groups — was developed by a team of media literacy experts and violence prevention specialists. It is made available by the non-profit Center for Media Literacy, headquartered in Los Angeles, the nation's leading producer and distributor of media education materials.

3. Through the use of *Beyond Blame*, parents and children alike will learn how to explore alternatives to violent entertainment, as well as gain knowledge to better participate in public discussions of this important issue.

Printed flyers and posters in key locations around town are essential, but you may wish to print up a more formal "invitation" for community leaders you'd like to attend. These busy people need *at least six weeks* notice of your event if possible.

What to Say

- Don't be afraid to use superlatives in your invitations (or advertising). After all, you've got to get people excited about attending this first public meeting so they will support the classes and workshops that will continue over the coming weeks and months.

- Call the approach of *Beyond Blame* "creative" and "comprehensive." It's all of that and more. And call the message of this multi-media education program "compelling," because that's what people have to feel in order to give up an afternoon or evening to attend a public meeting about violence in the media. They've got to be motivated to attend.

- Almost everyone talks about "the media" and most of us complain a great deal about violence but when it comes to signing up for a class or to attending a program on media violence, there may be some hesitation, usually unconscious: "Will I be made to feel guilty because I've let my children watch violence?" "Will I have to make changes in my own viewing habits?" Therefore, be as positive in publicizing your program as possible. Avoid announcements or titles that warn: "Learn to Tame the Tube!," or "Strike Back Against Violent TV!" Instead try positive phrases such as: "The Basics of Challenging Violence in the Media" or "What Every Parent Needs to Know About Media Violence."

- Remember that one goal of media literacy education is to engage participants in a dialogue around issues in the media. *Beyond Blame* is designed to help individuals of all ages learn how to *analyze* and *evaluate* the many sides of violence in the media issue, not to condemn media. Parents or adults who hesitate to join in the discussion may need to be reassured that their ideas will be respected and that the goal is information and empowerment rather than criticism or guilt.

Sample "Town Hall" Event Press Release

No two Town Hall meetings will be exactly the same, but this sample press release includes some basic language you may wish to incorporate or amend in your own notice to the media.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 20, 1995

Contact: Sally Smith
Day (222) 888-8888
Eve. (222) 999-9999

ANYTOWN SCHOOL BOARD LAUNCHING A SERIES OF VIOLENCE EDUCATION AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS WITH A "TOWN HALL MEETING," NEXT SUNDAY, JANUARY 29.

"Challenging Violence in the Media," will be the focus of classes and workshops for all age groups investigating the links between make-believe violence and real violence.

If the Anytown School Board succeeds with its new multi-media educational program, parents and children in our community will soon be exploring alternatives to violent entertainment. Armed with evidence that children's exposure to violence in the mass media, particularly at young ages, can have harmful lifelong consequences, the Anytime School Board voted last night to launch an eight-week program designed to help both parents and children explore alternatives to violent entertainment.

Today School Board President Carol Johnson announced that classes and workshops for all age groups will begin in February, using a "media literacy" resource created by a California non-profit group called the Center for Media Literacy.

"We're really excited about the potential for this program," said Ms. Johnson, "because it teaches parents and children alike how to develop skills for reducing their exposure to violence in the media." Entitled "Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media," the program is a video-based curriculum directed at elementary and middle school children, teenagers, and adult parents and caregivers.

"This program presents common-sense warnings from the American Psychological Association and others that 'aggressive habits learned early in life are the foundation for later behavior.' There are movies, MTV, and videogames that combined are changing attitudes and behaviors toward violence in very significant ways. It's a serious problem and this curriculum is the most comprehensive package we've found to address the issue for all age levels."

To explain the *BEYOND BLAME* program, and to create what Ms. Johnson calls a "public conversation" about the impact and influence of violent imagery in our mass media culture today, the school board is holding a "Town Hall"- meeting at the High School Auditorium next Sunday evening, January 27 at 7:00 P.M. The presentation will describe the curriculum in further detail and will include samples of the video clips used in the BEYOND BLAME program. Adults interested in attending classes over a __-week period will be able to sign up at the Sunday evening event. The adult "Parent and Caregiver Classes" will be held . . . [etc., etc.]

-30-

More Publicity Tips

- Create a publicity committee with as many experienced hands as you can find. They'll know about writing "Op-Ed" pieces, letters to the editor, drafting city council resolutions and erecting banners across Main Street. Effective publicity is the key to success.

- Often, violence in the media is a volatile issue with many different interpretations about what the real problems are and what can be done about the growth of violence in our time. Adults and parents may be skeptical that anything positive can come out of a situation that looks so hopeless.

  In many ways, overcoming our powerlessness around the media in general is the most fundamental part of reducing media violence.

- It is important for those developing flyers or publicity materials to study the key concepts of the *Beyond Blame* program in order not to misrepresent the goals of the program, especially with parents and adults.

Generating Attention for Your "Town Hall" Event

You will want to ask the most creative members of your Leadership Team to brainstorm about creating a photo opportunity or some other activity to generate free media attention and publicity prior to your "Town Hall" event. Here are two examples:

- **Bury a *TV Guide* Time Capsule**. The investment in time and effort is minimal and the costs are small, but the attention you could generate might well include a front-page picture in your local newspaper(s). The requirements:

  - one current copy of *TV Guide*,
  - a heavy-duty plastic tube, with caps (available from any plumbing supplier),
  - some sealant to keep it air-tight and waterproof,
  - an outer label (with a "DO NOT OPEN UNTIL 2025" message),
  - a pole digger (mechanical or human-powered),
  - and the permission of the city government or school board (whoever controls the property where you plan to dig, and possibly erect a small plaque).

  Ask a few teachers of various-aged classes to have their students write about the violence they see on TV and what they hope television programming will be like for their grandchildren in the year 2045. Stick those in the Time Capsule, too. Be sure to include a flyer or invitation about your media education and violence-prevention program and be certain that all reporters covering your time capsule burial know that next week on this day you will be holding a "Town Hall" Presentation described in the flyer you're burying.

- **A Daily "Body Count" Box Score.** Pick your week, select your prime-time hours, find some media monitors and arrange to have your local newspaper print the daily count of casualties on the previous night's TV. If you stick just to murders (thereby eliminating the need to define what constitutes other acts of violence) you'll still be astounded by the figures, which is why the average American child watches more than 8,000 screen murders by the end of elementary school. Ask your newspaper to run a line beneath the daily body count box score that says something such as this:

  You can learn how to change your response to violence by attending a public meeting on January 29 at the Anytown High School. A new multi-media program the school board has adopted will show the links between make-believe violence and real violence and offer ideas for what all of us can do about it.

Additional Uses for the Overview Presentation

- While serving as the primary structure for a Town Hall event, the Overview presentation also serves as an excellent "in-service" program for faculty and staff of schools, daycare centers, religious education programs or other institutions.

- It is also excellent for a "parents" night in schools before implementing the *Elementary* and *Middle School* curricula.

- In a religious congregation, schedule the Overview presentation to introduce key concepts of media literacy as violence prevention to various program leaders — e.g., family life coordinators; youth ministers; adult educators. Encourage widespread implementation of *Beyond Blame* activities in all program areas from religious school classes to senior citizen events to justice/peace groups.

- Community service groups may want to identify members who are effective presenters to form a team to present the Overview program on a regular basis to a variety of luncheon or potluck meetings throughout the community.

Further Strategies for Implementing *Beyond Blame* in your Community

For maximum impact, it is best if the *Beyond Blame* program is introduced in as many arenas as possible simultaneously. Your Leadership Team may want to consider some of the following suggestions for other components in the program:

The Elementary and Middle School Curricula

- These lesson plans can be used both in the classroom and in after-school programs. Also for religious education programs, summer camps or other non-school learning opportunities.

- The curriculum contains eight lessons designed to be conducted in consecutive order. But individual activities could also be used alone with proper preparation of students.

- Consider integrating the *Beyond Blame* sessions into already existing violence prevention or peer mediation programs in schools, churches or afterschool centers.

- There are many similarities between the lessons designed for elementary and middle school levels. For efficient preparation, teachers may want to team up and each specialize to conduct one or two of the lesson plans across several grades or age-groups.

- Activities could also be used in inter-generational settings, e.g, a weekend family retreat in a religious setting or in a family summer camp program.

The Teen/Adult Program

- Session plans in the *Teen/Adult* guide are more "stand-alone." Beyond the first two sessions, they can be conducted in any order.

- Individual sessions can be introduced in a variety of high school classes:
  Session #3: "Violence in the News" in social studies;
  Session #4: "Violence in Sports" in physical education;
  Session #5: "Women and Media Violence" in gender studies or values education;
  Session #7: "Economics of Media Violence" in business classes or global education.
  All would be useful for language arts or media studies in general.

- Selected *Teen/Adult* sessions can be conducted as supplementary or follow-up sessions in the *Parent/Caregiver* program. Similarly some of the *Parent/Caregiver* activities may be suitable for other teen or adult educational settings. For example, conduct Session #4: "What's Wrong with the Ratings?" with grandparents attending a senior citizen event.

- Sessions in this *Teen/Adult* guide could form the core of a 7-10 week adult education course in a junior college, library, community center or religious education program.

- The *Teen/Adult* program could be the basis for a day-long community gathering. Hold the first two basic sessions in the morning. (Have several sessions going on simultaneously in order to keep participants in groups of no more than 35-40). Invite an entertaining keynote speaker for lunch. In the afternoon have participants choose from a workshop menu using Sessions 3 - 7 from the *Teen/Adult* guide and Sessions 4 - 6 from the *Parent/Caregiver* Guide. Include a "media fair" with booths for the cable public access channel or a store to sell relevant books and videos. Invite the news media to cover the day!

- Conduct any of the *Teen/Adult* sessions as individual programs for a church, service club or senior citizen group.

- Individual adult program leaders may want to specialize and conduct only one session, e.g, Session #5: "Damsels in Distress" for a wide variety of women's groups.

The Parent/Caregiver Program

- The seven-sessions in this program can be supplemented with additional topical sessions on news, sports, sexuality or the economics of the entertainment industry from the *Teen/Adult* guide.

- Present the *Introduction/Overview* program to a parent or PTA group in order to identify parents who want to register to participate in the seven-session series.

- Offer the program on a continuing basis to allow as many parents and caregivers as possible to participate. This will generate and build support among families working to reduce violence in your community.

- Community centers should consider training a team of leaders to conduct *Parent/Caregiver* sessions throughout the community. Offer to co-sponsor the program with schools, libraries and religious institutions in order to build wide community support for parent education to reduce violence.

Television Violence and the Art of Asking the Wrong Question

by
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The Annenberg School for Communication
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The television violence overkill was first reported in a study by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters in 1951. The first Congressional hearings were held by Senator Estes Kefauver's Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954. The usual industry suspects were rounded up and gave what have since become the usual promises of mending their ways "next fall."

Next fall and most subsequent seasons, violence further increased as the freeze on new TV frequency allocations established the unchallenged cultural hegemony of national network broadcasting.

What is Wrong?

Clearly, something is wrong. Broadcasters are *licensed* to serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity." They are *paid* to deliver receptive audiences to their business sponsors. Few industries are as public relations-conscious as television. What compels them to endure public humiliation, risk the threat of repressive legislation and invite charges of undermining health, security and the social order?

The usual rationalization that violence delivers the goods — it "gives the audience what it wants" — is disingenuous. As the trade knows well and as we shall see, violence as such is not highly rated. That means that it coasts on viewer inertia, not selection.

Unlike other media use, viewing is a ritual; people watch by the clock and not by the program. To the limited extent that some programs have a larger share of certain time-slots and can, therefore, extract a higher price for commercials, violent programs in those time slots may yield the broadcaster some marginal profits. For a robust industry, sensitive to public and legislative criticism, those incremental profits are hardly worth the social, institutional and political damage violent programs exact.

Something is wrong with the way the problem has been posed and addressed. A virtual obsession with asking the wrong question obscures the factors that in fact drive violence and trap the industry in a difficult dilemma. The usual question — "Does television violence incite real-life violence?" — is itself a symptom rather than diagnostic tool of the problem. Despite its alarming implications, and intent, or perhaps because of them, it distracts from focusing on the major conditions producing violence in society and limits discussion of television violence to its most simplistic dimension.

Violence is a complex scenario and social relationship. Whatever else it does, violence in drama and news demonstrates power. It portrays victims, as well as victimizers. It intimidates, as well as incites. It shows one's place in the "pecking order" that runs society. And, it "travels well" on the world market.

Changing the Debate

Let us, then, try to change the terms of the debate so that something might come of it.

Violence on television is an integral part of a system of global marketing. It dominates an increasing share of the world's screens. Despite its relative lack of popularity in any country, the system has far-reaching consequences. It inhibits other dramatic approaches to conflict, depresses independent television production, deprives viewers of more popular choices, victimizes some and emboldens others, heightens general intimidation and invites repressive postures that exploit the widespread insecurities it itself generates.

Behind the problem of television violence is, therefore, not only the simple problem of regulation (or industry self-regulation) but the more critical issue of who makes cultural policy in the post-electronic age. Reconsidering the debate about violence creates an opportunity to move the cultural policy issue to center stage, where it has long been in most other democracies.

The convergence of communication technologies concentrates control over

JUMP START by Robb Armstrong

LOOK. SHE'S MESMERIZED BY THE TELEVISION!
!
DON'T DO THAT!
I DON'T WANT HER TO GET HOOKED ON TV! I WON'T ALLOW MORE THAN ONE HOUR PER WEEK!
TV ISN'T SO BAD. I GREW UP ON A STEADY DIET OF TV! I TURNED OUT FINE.
MAKE THAT A HALF HOUR PER WEEK!
8-24

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the most widely shared messages and images. With all the technocratic fantasies about hundreds of channels, and with the anti-violence posturing filling the mass media, it is rare to encounter discussion of basic issues of policy. The questions we ought to be raising are these:

- What creative sources and resources can provide what mix of content that flows along the "electronic superhighway" into every home?
- Who will tell the stories to our children and for what underlying purpose?
- How can we assure the survival of alternative perspectives?
- What conceptions of reality do these systems cultivate?
- Why does violence play such a prominent, pervasive and persistent role in them?
- How [do we] deal with the current proliferation of violence while, at the same time, enhancing rather then further curtailing cultural freedom and diversity?

The New Cultural Environment

A child today is born into a home in which television is on an average of over seven hours a day. For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life and values are told not by parents, schools, churches, or others in the community who have something to *tell* but by a group of distant conglomerates that have something to *sell*.

'Happy violence' is cool, swift, painless and often spectacular, designed not to upset but to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a mood to buy.

These questions have been discussed and sometimes dealt with in the parliaments and legislatures of both established and newly emerging democracies. For example, France levies a 3 percent tax on theater admissions and a 2 percent tax on videotapes, which is paid into a fund for independent productions. Other countries in Europe and Scandinavia have comparable programs.

In the United States, these questions have not yet been placed on the agenda of public discourse.

What follows, then, is an attempt to formulate and address some prior questions we need to address before we can construct such an agenda.

- What is new and different about television?
- What systems of casting and fate dominate its representations of life?

This is a radical change in the way we employ creative talent and shape the cultural environment. Television is a relatively non-selectively used ritual. Other media require literacy, growing up, going out and making a selection based on some previously acquired criteria.

But most people watch by the clock and not by the program, and that means that TV is the only medium that will reach viewers with messages and images they would otherwise never select. All other media — films and print — are used selectively by people seeking out what interests them.

But there is no "before" with television. Television is there at birth and stays there throughout life. It helps to shape from the outset the predispositions and selections that govern the use of other media. Unlike other media, television requires little or no attention;its repetitive patterns are absorbed in the course of living. They become part and parcel of the family's style of life, but they neither stem from nor respond to its needs and wants.

The roles children grow into are no longer home-made, hand-crafted, community-inspired. They are products of a complex, integrated and globalized manufacturing and marketing system. Television violence is an integral part of that system.

Not All Violence is Alike

Of course, there is blood in fairy tales, gore in mythology, murder in Shakespeare. Not all violence is alike. Violence is a legitimate and even necessary cultural expression. Individually crafted, historically inspired, sparingly and selectively used expressions of symbolic violence can balance tragic costs against deadly compulsions. However, such tragic sense of life has been swamped by violence with happy endings produced on the dramatic assembly-line. This "happy violence" is cool, swift, painless and often spectacular, designed not to upset but to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a mood to buy.

How people and life are represented in the new cultural environment is not only a question of numbers. Representation cultivates a sense of opportunities and life chances. It contributes to our conceptions of who we are and how we relate to others and the world. It helps define our strengths and vulnerabilities, our powers and our risks. No longer can family and community engender a sense of self and of values without the presence in the home of a tireless stranger telling all the stories.

On the whole, prime-time television presents a relatively small set of common themes, and violence pervades most of them. The majority of network viewers have little choice of thematic context or character types, and virtually no chance of avoiding violence.

Nor has the proliferation of channels

About *Cultural Indicators*

The findings in this article come from an ongoing research project called Cultural Indicators which, since 1967, has monitored every year the world of television. It now contains observations on over 3000 programs and 35,000 characters, coded according to many thematic, demographic and action categories.

The monitoring is then subjected to cultivation analysis, which determines how TV contributes to viewers' understanding of life as presented on television and in the real world.

Over the years, the CI project has provided significant research support on the impact of TV violence, the image of women and minorities on television, TV's portrayal of aging, disability and mental health issues and many others.

The project is conducted at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and is directed by George Gerbner in collaboration with Michael Morgan at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Nancy Signorielli at the University of Delaware. Thanks for research assistance to Mariaelena Bartesaghi, Cynthia Kandra, Robin Kim, Amy Nyman and Nejat Ozyegin.

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led to greater diversity of actual viewing. If anything, the dominant dramatic patterns penetrate more deeply into viewer choices through more outlets managed by fewer owners airing programs produced by fewer creative sources.

Casting and Fate

Annual monitoring and analysis of network television drama (see sidebar on the Cultural Indicators project) provides an aggregate bird's-eye view of familiar territory. It is what everybody watches but nobody sees — from the ground.

Casting and fate — the building blocks of the story-telling process — reflects and accommodates the violence scenario. Middle-class, white male characters dominate in numbers and power. Women play one out of three characters. Young people comprise one-third and old one-fifth of their actual proportions of the population. Most other minorities are even more underrepresented. That cast sets the stage for stories of conflict, violence and the projection of white male prime-of-life power.

The moderate viewer of prime-time television drama sees every week an average of 21 violent criminals arrayed against an army of 41 public and private law enforcers, most of them equally violent. There are, week in and week out, 14 doctors, 6 nurses, 6 lawyers and 2 judges to handle them. An average of 150 acts of violence and about 15 murders entertain us and our children every week, and that does not count cartoons and the news. Those who watch over three hours a day (more than half of all viewers) absorb much more.

About one out of three (31 percent) of all characters and more than half (52 percent) of major characters are involved in violence in any given week. The ratio of violence to victimization defines the price to be paid for committing violence. When one group can commit violence with relative impunity, the price it pays for violence is relatively low. When another group suffers more violence than it commits, the price is high.

In the total cast of prime-time characters, the average "risk ratio" (number of victims per 10 violent characters) is 12. But the price paid in victims for every 10 violent characters is 15 for boys, 16 for girls, 17 for young women, 18.5 for lower class characters, and over 20 for elderly characters. Women, children, poorer and older people and some minorities pay a higher price for violence than do white males in the prime of life.

For every 10 "good" women who kill, 6 are killed, and for every 10 women of color who kill, 17 are killed. Older women characters get involved in violence only to be killed.

Violence takes on an even more defining role for major characters. It involves more than half of all major characters (58 percent of men and 41 percent of women). Most likely to be involved either as perpetrators or victims, or both, are characters portrayed as mentally ill (84 percent), young adult males (69 percent) and Latino/Hispanic Americans (64 percent). Children, lower class and mentally ill or otherwise disabled characters, pay the highest price — 13-16 victims for every 10 perpetrators.

Lethal victimization extends the pattern. About 5 percent of all characters and 10 percent of major characters kill or are killed, or both. Most likely to be so involved are Latino/Hispanic and lower class characters. Being poor, old or a woman of color means double-trouble; they pay the highest relative price for projecting that kind of power.

Major characters who are "bad" are, of course, more likely to be killed than those portrayed as "good." But gender, race and age also matter. For every 10 positively valued men who kill, about 4 are killed. But for every 10 "good" women who kill, 6 are killed, and for every 10 women of color who kill, 17 are killed. Older women characters get involved in violence *only* to be killed.

The Cultural Indicators team calculated a violence "pecking order" by ranking the risk ratios of the different groups. Hurting and killing by most majority groups extracts a tooth for a tooth. Minority groups tend to pay a higher price for their show of force. Women, especially older women, children and youth, lower class, mentally disabled people and Asian Americans are at the bottom of the heap.

What Drives Television Violence?

Formula-driven violence in entertainment and news is not a reflection of freedom, viewer preference, or even crime statistics. It is the product of a complex manufacturing and marketing machine. Mergers, consolidation, conglomeratization and globalization fuel the machine.

"Studios are clipping productions and consolidating operations, closing off gateways for newcomers," notes the trade paper *Variety* on the front page of its August 2, 1993 issue. The number of major studios declines while their share of domestic and global markets rises. Channels proliferate while investment in new talent drops, gateways close and creative sources shrink.

Concentration brings streamlining of production (denying entry to newcomers, reducing the number of buyers and thus competition for the products) and increasing the dramatic formulas suitable for aggressive international promotion. Program production is costly, risky and hard-pressed by oligopolistic pricing practices. Most producers cannot break even on the license fees they receive for domestic airings. They are forced to go into syndication and foreign sales to make

...Violence in drama and news demonstrates power... It intimidates as well as incites. It shows one's place in the "pecking order" that runs society. And, it "travels well" on the world market.

- to believe that their neighborhoods are unsafe;
- to state that fear of crime is a very serious personal problem;
- to assume that crime is rising, regardless of the facts of the case.

Heavy viewers are also more likely to buy new locks, watchdogs and guns "for protection."

Television's impact is especially pronounced in terms of how people feel about walking alone at night on a street in their own neighborhoods. Overall, less than a third of the light viewers, but almost half of the heavy viewers, say that being out alone at night on their own street is "not safe." Whatever real dangers may lurk outside people's homes, heavy television viewing is related to more intense fears and apprehensions.

The patterns of victimization on television and real-world fear, even if contrary to fact, are also related. Viewers who see their own group have a higher calculus of risk than those of other groups develop a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust and alienation — the "mean world syndrome." This unequal sense of danger, vulnerability and general unease, combined with reduced sensitivity, invites not only aggression but also exploitation and repression.

The projection of power is a function of all cultures and mainstream mass media. Television streamlines it, sanitizes it, puts it on the dramatic assembly line and discharges it into the world's common cultural environment.

An Epidemic of Fear

The "mean world" of television explodes with a powerful political fallout. Insecure people may be prone to violence but are even more likely to be dependent on authority and susceptible to deceptively simple, strong, hard-line postures. They may accept and even welcome repression if it promises to relieve their anxieties.

Although violence is occurring at younger ages and plagues poorer (often minority) neighborhoods, the real epidemic we have is not homicidal violence but the fear of violence and the soaring rate of incarceration in what is already the most imprisonment-prone society in the industrial world. The more affluent are also imprisoned in their own neighborhoods and cars, afraid to walk in the city or to use public transportation.

Most politicians, however, cannot resist the appeal (and competitive pressure) of advocating ever harsher measures that have never reduced violence but always get votes.

What is the Alternative?

There is a liberating alternative. It exists in various forms in most other democratic countries, exemplified by elected or appointed representation in either advisory or policy-making capacity over the programming policy of TV systems. In the United States, what is needed is independent grassroots citizen organization and action in order to provide the broad support needed for loosening the global marketing noose around the necks of producers, writers, directors, actors and journalists.

More freedom from violent and other inequitable and intimidating formulas, not more censorship, is the effective and acceptable way to increase diversity and reduce television violence to its legitimate role and proportion.

The role of Congress, if any, is to turn its anti-trust and civil rights oversight on the centralized and globalized industrial structures and marketing strategies that impose violence on creative people and foist it on the children of the world.

The role of citizens is to participate in creating new public policies that reverse the tide of violence by working for freedom from stereotyped formulas, for investing in a freer and more diverse cultural environment, and for citizen participation in cultural decisions that shape our lives and the lives of our children.

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Violence and Video Games: What is A Life Worth?

No democratic society can be comfortable with censorship. But it seems that as each new medium has reached maturity, the threat of censorship has been needed to "boot up" its conscience.

What is the right way for computer and videogame manufacturers to police themselves? My research leads me to conclude that neither age limits alone, nor sex/violence/language ratings alone, can adequately do the job. Like movies, TV shows, and novels, these programs and games create mental environments for their users. A crucial variable in any created environment is what you might call the relative value of life embodied in that world.

The issue is not so simple as how many guns go off or how many on-screen bodies fall victim to violence. The question is more subtle, yet still quantifiable: How precious or cheap is life made to seem in this world? If you pick up a CD-ROM game called "Doom," where your manifest assignment is to deploy a broad arsenal of "virtual" weapons to kill anything that moves, the implied value of life is shockingly low. It should be labeled as such. Pick up Pedro Meyer's CD-ROM "I Photograph to Remember," and you'll still come across a death (that of the photographer's father), but, as in a Shakespearean tragedy, it's a death that makes you feel even more strongly the essential value of life.

Whether they use a pie chart or a thermometer, what the video-game makers need — what the culture needs — is a firm grasp of the Relative Value of Life scale. It's the only way we can start telling the weeds from the flowers in our multimedia gardens and begin to sort out what's worth noting from what's worth nothing.

Excerpted from "Rethink Ratings For Video Games," an article by Brian Stonehill in the August 18, 1994 issue of The Christian Science Monitor. *Reprinted with permission. Mr. Stonehill directs the Media Studies program at Pomona College, Pomona, California.*

a profit. They need a dramatic ingredient that requires no translation, "speaks action" in any language and fits any culture. That ingredient is violence. (Explicit sex is a distant second. Ironically, it runs into more inhibitions and restrictions overseas.)

Syndicators demand "action" (the code word for violence) because it "travels well around the world," said the producer of *Die Hard 2* (which killed 264 compared to 18 in the initial *Die Hard*). "Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language."

"Everyone understands an action movie. If I tell a joke, you may not get it but if a bullet goes through the window, we all know how to hit the floor, no matter the language."

producer, *Die Hard II*

Our analysis of international data shows that violence dominates U.S. exports. We compared 250 U.S. programs exported to 10 countries with 111 programs shown in the U.S. during the same year. Violence was the main theme of 40 percent of home-shown and 49 percent of exported programs. Crime/action series comprised 17 percent of home-shown and 46 percent of exported programs.

There is no evidence that, other factors being equal, violence *per se* is giving most viewers, countries and citizens "what they want." The most highly rated programs are usually not violent. The trade paper *Broadcasting & Cable* editorialized (Sept. 20, 1993, p. 66) that "the most popular programming is hardly violent as anyone with a passing knowledge of Nielsen ratings will tell you." The editorial added that "Action hours and movies have been the most popular exports for years..." i.e, with the exporters, not necessarily the audiences.

Of course, graphic violence in movies, videos, videogames and other spectacles attracts sizeable audiences. But those audiences are minuscule compared to the home audience for television. They are the selective retail buyers of what television dispenses wholesale. Even a small proportion of one-day's television audience addicted to explicit violence can make many movies and games spectacularly successful.

Most television viewers, however, suffer the violence daily inflicted on them with diminishing tolerance. Organizations of creative workers in media, health professionals, law enforcement agencies and virtually all other media-oriented professional and citizen groups have come out against "gratuitous" television violence. A March 1985 Harris survey showed that 78 percent disapprove of violence they see on television. A Gallup poll of October 1990 found 79 percent in favor of "regulating" objectionable content in television. A Times-Mirror national poll in 1993 showed that Americans who said they were "personally bothered" by violence in entertainment shows jumped to 59 percent from 44 percent ten years earlier. Furthermore, 80 percent said entertainment violence was "harmful" to society, compared with only 64 percent in 1983.

Local broadcasters, legally responsible for what goes on the air, also oppose the overkill and complain about loss of control. *Electronic Media* reported on August 2, 1993, the results of its own survey of 100 general managers across all regions and in all market sizes. Three out of four said there is too much needless violence on television; 57 percent would like to have "more input on program content decisions."

The Hollywood Caucus of Producers, Writers and Directors, speaking for the creative community, said in a statement issued in August 1993:

"We stand today at a point in time when the country's dissatisfaction with the quality of television is at an all-time high, while our own feelings of helplessness and lack of power, in not only choosing material that seeks to enrich, but also in our ability to execute to the best of our ability, is at an all-time low."

Far from reflecting creative freedom, the marketing of formula violence restricts freedom and chills originality. The violence formula is, in fact, a *de facto* censorship extending the dynamics of domination, intimidation and repression domestically and globally. The typical political and legislative response too often reflects, exploits and exacerbates those dynamics.

What are the Consequences?

These representations are not the sole or necessarily even the main determinants of what people think or do. But they are the most pervasive, inescapable, common and policy-directed cultural contributions to what large communities absorb over long periods of time.

Cultivation analysis attempts to assess those "lessons." It explores whether those who spend more time with television are more likely than lighter viewers to perceive the real world in ways that reflect common and repetitive features of the television world, the most pervasive of which is violence.

The systemic patterns observed in television content provide the basis for formulating survey questions about people's conceptions of social reality. Respondents in each sample are divided into those who watch the most television, those who watch a moderate amount and those who watch the least. Cultivation is assessed by comparing patterns of responses in the three viewing groups (light, medium and heavy) while controlling for important demographic and other characteristics.

The "Mean World Syndrome"

What do we find? Violence-laden television contributes significantly to the feeling of living in a mean and gloomy world. By far the most pervasive effect is that of a cluster of responses we call the "mean world syndrome."

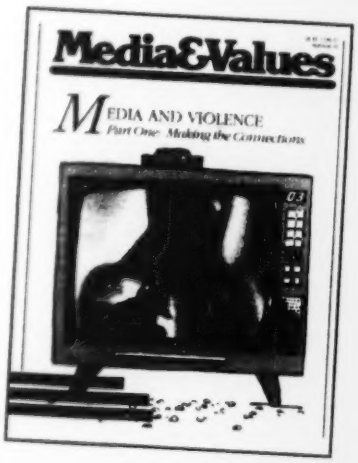
Symbolic violence takes its toll on all viewers. However, heavier viewers in every subgroup (defined by education, age, income, gender, newspaper reading, neighborhood, etc.) express a greater sense of apprehension than do light viewers in the same groups. They are more likely than comparable groups of light viewers:

- to overestimate their chances of involvement in violence;

Highlights from *Media&Values*

The following summaries provide quick reference to the articles from the two-part series of Media&Values *magazine on media and violence. When combined, they also form a comprehensive "short course" on all aspects of the media violence issue.*

Media and Violence
Part One: Making the Connections
Issue #62



Making Connections: Media's Role in Our Culture of Violence

In a passionate opening essay, Elizabeth Thoman calls for readers to join the media literacy movement to "help transform our culture of violence into a culture of concern." She outlines a multimedia education program for children and adults that empowers them to challenge violence in the media, both in the living room and the world (p. 2).

Babylon Revisited: How Our Violent Origins Resurface in Today's Media

Walter Wink, respected professor of biblical interpretation, offers a provocative and compelling historical perspective on violence in the media. He notes how ancient Babylonian religion long ago relied upon the myth of redemptive violence as the dominanting source of power — "the first articulation of 'might makes right.'" He also points out how the myth of redemptive violence resurfaces in today's media, most notably in Western films as the myth of the American West (pp. 3-5).

Strung Out on Aggression: Has the American Dream Become a Violent Nightmare?

Director of the Institute for Creative Development, Charles M. Johnston takes a thoughtful look at the relationship betwen violence in media and the demise of the "American Dream." He discovers that the lack of belief in a better future is a major reason for the "addictive power" of violence and notes that finding an "antidote" for violence is "the fundamental challenge of our time — to work together to write the much-needed next chapter in our cultural story" (pp. 6-7).

SIDEBAR: Measuring Jolts Per Minute - Outlines how mediamakers spice up programs and movies with "jolts" to keep viewer interest.

Growing Up Violent: Decades of Research Link Screen Mayhem With Increase in Aggressive Behavior

David S. Barry, journalist and screenwriter details research studies that demonstrate a positive correlation between media violence and real-life violence. He illustrates how this connection dramatically affects the quality of childrens' lives and urges society to "face the evidence...and to come to some sober conclusions about our responsibilities to the common good" (pp. 8-11).

SIDEBAR: Landmarks in the Media/ Violence Connection - The four-decade issue of media violence is chronicled.

SIDEBAR: Six Ways Film Violence Affects Behavior - Six distinct characteristics of violent content in film and their affect on viewers are outlined.

A Tale of Three Countries: Homicide Rates Rise After Television's Arrival

Brandon Centerwall, M.D., comments on his groundbreaking study comparing television and homicide rates following TV's introduction in the United States and Canada in the late 1950s and South Africa in the late 1970's. Stressing that the effects of exposure to television violence in childhood on adult criminal behavior are clear, he urges parents and adults to limit their children's TV viewing and encourage other activities and interests (pp. 12-13).

No Doubt About It - Media Violence Affects Behavior

Citing research studies which clearly demonstrate that youth violence is a public health problem, psychology professor Leonard D. Eron appeals to media producers to exercise greater caution and social responsibility regarding violence on the screen (p. 14).

View From the Network: What Counts as Violence?

Horst Stipp, Director of Social Development Research at NBC-TV questions media violence research noting that slapstick comedy is counted as a violent act. Nevertheless, he supports industrywide standards for using violence in which all networks can adhere (p. 15).

SIDEBAR: Define Media Violence for Yourself - Readers define media violence through a series of crtical questions.

Slasher Films May Be Kids' Introduction to Sex

Focusing on the problem of sexual violence in media, communications professor Edward Donnerstein, describes the current MPAA ratings system as "woefully inadequate" in providing parents with information regarding a film's content and needs "massive change before it will be effective" (p. 16).

SIDEBAR: Media Violence: Japan vs. America - A brief comparative analysis of violence in media between Japanese and American movies and television.

Writers Tell Stories of a Violent Society

Former president of the Writers Guild of America/West, Del Reisman, firmly defends the right of writers be able to "tell the stories of our time" without network censorship or government interference and points out that audience taste and preference play a significant role in the type of movies that are made (p. 17).

Public Policy Must Focus on Cause of Violence

Peggy Charren, author of the Children's Television Act believes that "increased resources for health care, child care, housing, education and jobs," will effectively counter the impact of media violence and urges lawmakers to create more communication legislation that hold media to standards which meet the educational needs of children (p. 18).

Suggestions For Parents: Children Can Unlearn Violence

Child development professor Judith Myers-Walls, notes that cartoons often place violence within humorous contexts and rarely show the consequences of violence. She urges parents to help children recognize the difference between fantasy and reality and show them that there are alternatives to violence (p. 19).

Canada Adopts Five-Point Plan to Ban Violence on Television

No longer "waiting for the US," Canada has moved ahead with a nationwide program to curb media violence with the collaboration of industry, government and citizen groups. This article details how they did it and why (p. 20).

The Violence Formula/How to Analyze for Violence in TV, Movies and Video

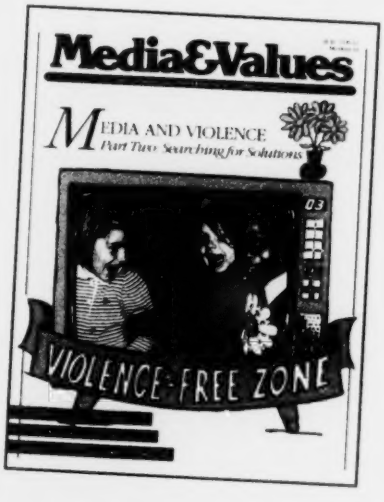
Provides practical worksheet for families and groups to identify media violence, how it works and works them over as viewers. Used in several *Beyond Blame* sessions (pp. 21-22).

Beyond Blame: Media Literacy as Violence Prevention

"Media literacy can contribute to lessening the impact and incidence of violence in our lives," declares executive director Elizabeth Thoman. This impassioned essay was reprinted nationwide as an op-ed piece by *The Los Angeles Times* (p. 24).

Media and Violence: Part Two: Searching for Solutions

Issue #63



Challenging the Myths of Media Violence

Rosalind Silver, editor of *Media&Values* delivers an eloquent essay describing the five myths of media violence with particular attention on how the myths create a "cycle of blame." She points out that this cycle often derails individual participation in lessening the impact of media violence and urges readers to go "beyond blame" by becoming personally involved in creating solutions to the problem of media violence (pp. 2-3).

Like Money in the Bank: Understanding Media's Investment in Violence

In order to truly understand violence in media, we need to first understand media's investment in violence, as well as critically evaluate our own involvement in a society that allows violence in media to be profitable. Widely quoted media critic and author Elayne Rapping, Ph.D., brilliantly illustrates the economic investment media have in using violence. She demonstrates the double standard of a 1993 *Newsweek* cover article, pointing out that the magazine featured violence for the same reason it criticized other media: to make money (pp. 4-6).

SIDEBAR: Media Must Tell Truth About Violence - Assistant dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D. reveals her insights on how to curb the effects of media violence.

New Heroes for a New Age

Futurist and author Arthur Kanegis offers several inspiring stories where conflicts were resolved through nonviolent means. Citing the life and work of historical and contemporary heroic figures like Thomas Jefferson, Jane Addams, Stephen Biko and Mother Teresa, he challenges writers, producers and directors to seek out and tell stories that inspire adults and children as well as create new role models (pp.7-9).

SIDEBAR: Anger Management Skills Can Help Media Create Positive Role Models - A brief outline of a public education campaign to promote anger management skills sponsored by the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives.

Now, A Word from Mother: A Parent's Perspective on Violence in the Media

"Too often television is not about protecting speech, [but] protecting a business," says *Washington Post* staff writer Megan Rosenfeld in repsonse to television executives who say that any effort to regulate TV content threatens their First Amendment rights. In this lively and witty essay, she points out that violence is not what the public wants — only 2 of the 20 top-rated newtork shows could be classified as violent. She insists the television industry should seriously re-assess its use of violence and begin to promote healthier, positive alternatives for the public good (pp. 10-11).

No More Blood at Eleven: TV News Needs to Report Conflict Responsibly

Veteran journalist Kitty Felde argues against the idea that news reports of crime help viewers feel safer because "it's not happening to them." She challenges news directors and reporters to provide more social, economic and political context when reporting stories involving violence and a lot more air time to individuals and organizations that are working to reduce violence in the community (p. 12).

SIDEBAR: How Reporters Can Make a Difference - Reporter Matthew Case outlines six guidelines for reporting crime stories more responsibly.

What's Wrong with the Ratings?

Respected communications researcher Barbara J. Wilson, Ph.D., offers a thorough analysis and critique of the current movie ratings system, pointing out that ratings are based on what parents would find offensive, not what might be harmful to children. Citing years of social science research, Wilson details how movie content truly affects children and proposes improvements to the ratings system which would provide parents with more accurate information about the movies their children want to see (pp. 13-15).

SIDEBAR: What Other Countries Do About Ratings - Mediascope researcher Joel Federman details other countries efforts to create a better, more accurate movie ratings system.

20 Ways to Create a Caring Culture

A thought-provoking list of 20 ideas for lessening the impact of media violence generated by a distinguished panel of educators and community leaders who attended a breakthrough conference sponsored by the media research organization Mediascope and the Center for Media Literacy. The article challenges readers to be creative and take individual action to create their own solutions to media violence. The list forms the basis for several action-oriented sessions throughout the *Beyond Blame* program (pp. 16-19).

Super Bowl Commercial Raises Awareness of Violence Against Women

This article details public service announcements aired during the 1993 Super Bowl that were designed to bring attention to the "lack of media coverage on the issue of domestic violence against women." However, these PSA's were based on faulty assumptions of a research report which found "evidence of a correlation betwen sports and a rise in domestic violence." Despite the controversy, the PSAs were fairly successful in raising awareness about domestic violence (p. 20).

Organizations Working to Create a Nonviolent Media Culture

A descriptive list of national and international organizations seeking positive and productive solutions to violence in society. Each description includes an address and phone number for further contact (p. 21).

Imagine... A Media of Meaning

A bold and inspiring message from Elizabeth Thoman, executive director, to individuals, local organizations and national agencies to step up to the challenge of lessening the impact and presence of media violence. She stresses the importance of a worldwide commitment to creating a caring world in which children can grow up, safe and healthy (p. 22).

Taking a Stand: A Postcard Campaign for Nonviolent News

Media educator Barbara Osborn details the story of Mary Beth Boesen, a member of Stand Against Violence Everywhere who influenced her local news station in Denver to air more stories of positive community programs and organizations through an effective postcard campaign. Osborn then invites readers to begin their own similar postcard campaign through simple "how to" instructions (p. 23).

Need More Copies?

Additional copies of this 2-part series on media and violence are available as a single set for $7 or individually in low quantity prices. To order, call the Center for Media Literacy: 1-800-226-9494.

Bibliography and Resources On Media and Violence

Books

TV Violence, Children and the Press: Eight Rationales Inhibiting Public Policy Debates. Philosopher Sissela Bok reviews key concepts in the media/violence debate. (1994) Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 79 J.F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, MA 02138. (617)495-8269, $3.

Preposterous Violence: Fables of Aggression in Modern Culture. James B. Twitchwell looks at the history of violent entertainment and its attractions (1989). Oxford University Press, 201 Evans Rd., Cary NC 27531-2009; (800)451-7556, $30.

Faces of the Enemy: The Psychology of Enmity. Sam Keen shows how ad images and political cartoons promote hatred (1988). Harper and Row, 1150 Battery St., San Francisco, CA 94111-1213, (800)328-5125, $16.95.

TV Interactive Toys: The New High Tech Threat to Children. Pamela Tuchscherer provides practical ways to take charge of violent games and cartoons (1989). Pinnaroo Publishing, P.O. Box 7525, Bend, OR 97708; (503)947-5002, $9.95.

"Teaching Our Kids to Kill" chapter 3 from ***Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem*** by Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D. is an excellent summary of media/violence issues (1991). Harper Perennial, Box 588, Keystone Industrial Park, Scranton, PA 18512; (800)331-3761, $12.

Media, Children and Family: Social Scientific, Psychodynamic and Clinical Perspectives edited by Dolf Zillman, Jennings Bryant and Aletha Huston. Part 3 of this in-depth reader focuses on *"Effects of Violence and Horror"* (1994). $34.50. Also: *"The Question of Media Violence"* by Barrie Gunter, chapter 7 in ***Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research***. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman explore the history and effects of violence on television (1994). $29.95. Both available from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 365 Broadway, Hillsdale, NJ 07642; (201)666-4110.

The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth by R. Liebert and J. Sprafkin (1988). Pergamon Press, 660 White Plains Rd., Tarrytown, NY 10591; (914)524-9200.

Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society. Aletha Huston, et al. A report of the American Psychological Association task force to review literature on the positive and negative effects of TV advertising and programming (1992). University of Nebraska Press, 312 N. 14th St., P.O. Box 880484, Lincoln, NE 68588; (800)755-1105, $12.

TV and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence by the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior is a classic violence study (1972). Available in your local library.

Classroom Combat: Teaching and Television by Maurine Doerken. A bit dated but excellent review of research on violence and advertising. (1983) Educational Technology Pubs, 700 Palisade Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632; (201)871-4007, $34.95.

Who's Calling the Shots? How to Respond Effectively to Children's Fascination with War Play and War Toys by N. Carlsson-Paige and D. Levin. Practical advice for parents and teachers. (1990) Center for Media Literacy / (800)226-9494. $12.95.

Policy Statements

"Violence in Electronic Media and Film." Policy statement of the National Council of Churches (1993). NCC, 475 Riverside Dr., #572, New York, NY 10115; (202)870-2377, free.

"Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response." Summary report of the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth. First copy free, $4 for each additional copy. Also, ***"Violence on Television: What Do Children Learn? What Can Parents Do?"*** pamphlet. APA, Public Interest Directorate, 750 First St., NE, Washington, D.C. 20002-4242; (202)336-5500, free.

"TV Violence: Fraying Our Social Fabric." A 1993 report detailing Canada's efforts to curb media violence. Also, ***"Scientific Knowledge About TV Violence."*** Both from CRTC, Public Affairs, Ottawa, ONT. K1A 0N2; (819)997-0313, free.

"Television, Violence, Children and the First Amendment: Can They All Get Along?" January 1994 issue of *Education Issue Update*. The National PTA, 330 N. Wabash Ave., #2100, Chicago, IL 60611-3690; (312)670-6782, free.

Magazine Articles

"What Won't They Do?" Ken Auletta interviews Hollywood decisionmakers. *The New Yorker*, May 17, 1993.

"Fake Blood: Why Nothing Gets Done About Media Violence" by Martha Bayles in the *Brookings Review*, Fall 1993.

"Why Blame TV?" by John Leonard. December 27, 1993 issue of *The Nation*.

"TV Violence" the March 26, 1993 issue of the *Congressional Quarterly Researcher* is a thorough and comprehensive summary of the issues.

"On the Regulation of Broadcast Indecency to Protect Children" by Edward Donnerstein, et al. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 36, 111-117.

"Applying Social Science Research to Film Ratings: The Shift from Offensiveness to Harmful Effects" Barbara Wilson, et al., from *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 34, 443-468.

"Media Violence: Between Censorship and License Is the Literate Consumer" by Wally Bowen. *Education Week*, March 16, 1994.

"Playing Immortal Combat: Game Violence Under Fire." Corey Sandler. *Multimedia World*, June 1994, 117-118.

"Honey, I Warped the Kids" by Carl Cannon and ***"Passing the Buck in Tinseltown"*** by Michael Krasny, both from *Mother Jones*, July/August 1993.

"Crime Scam: How 'Crime Wave' Coverage Distracts Us from Solutions," May/June, 1994 cover story in EXTRA!, (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting / (212)633-6700.)

"Tales from the Cutting-Room Floor" by Debra Segal in *Harpers*, November 1993 reveals how popular police "reality" shows are put together.

"Blown Away" by Martin Amis traces the history of violent imagery in film. *The New Yorker*, May 30, 1994.

Videos

Media Mayhem: More Than Make Believe. Helps young people understand that media violence is contrived and does not reflect reality, 30 min. (1994). NEWIST/CES 7, Studio B, University of Wisconsin/Green Bay, Green Bay, WI 54311; (800) 633-7445, $50 rental, $195 purchase.

Investigative Reports: Primetime Violence. A documentary on the debate over violence on TV, 47 min (1994). A&E Network, P.O. Box 2284, South Burlington, VT 05407; (800)423-1212, $23.90.

The Killing Screens: Media and the Culture of Violence. A conversation with violence researcher Dr. George Gerbner, 55 min. (1994). The Media Education Foundation, 26 Center St., Northhampton MA 01060; (800)659-6882, $125. Schools: $97.50.

Violence in the Media. Two-hour video of an October 1994 national teleconference features experts on the topic with updates on legislation, research and ideas for parent and community action. EcuFilm, 810 12th Ave., S., Nashville, TN 37203; 800-251-4091, $28.70.

Watching TV. Five-minute animated satire on TV violence. National Film Board of Canada. (In U.S.: 1251 Ave. of the Americas, 16th Fl., New York, NY 10020; (212)586-5131. Purchase/with public performance rights: $75 + $5 s/h.)

Organizations

National Alliance for Nonviolent Programming. A coalition of national and international women's organizations. 1846 Banking St., Greensboro, NC 27408; (910)370-0407.

Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment (CCAVE), c/o 167 Glen Rd., Toronto, ONT M4W 2W8; (416)961-0853.

Center for Media Literacy, Publisher of *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*. 1962 S. Shenandoah St., Los Angeles, CA 90034; (310)559-2944.

National Coalition on Television Violence, 247 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212; (310)278-5433.

National Foundation to Improve Television, 60 State St., #3400, Boston, MA 02109; (617)523-6353.

Media Awareness Network / National Film Board of Canada, 179 Rideau St., Ottawa, ON K1A 0M9, (613)992-5380.

Violence Prevention Curricula (general)

Comprehensive Clearinghouses

Adolescent Violence Prevention Resource Center, 55 Chapel St., Newton, MA 02160; (617)969-7100.

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, U. of Colorado/Boulder, Box 442, Boulder, CO 80309-0442; (303)492-1032.

National Association for Mediation in Education, 205 Hampshire House / U. of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003-3635; (413)545-2462.

Curriculum Developers:

Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138; (617)492-1764.

The Conflict Center, 2564 S. Yates St., Denver, CO 80219; (303)936-3286.

Committee for Children, 172 20th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122; (800)634-4449

Lesson One Foundation, Inc., 25 Huntington Ave., #321, Boston, MA 02116; (617)247-2787.

Center for Psychology and Social Change, 1493 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA 02139; (617)497-1553.

Also check *Media&Values* magazines for other organizations and resource lists.

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Beyond Blame:
CHALLENGING VIOLENCE
IN THE MEDIA

EVALUATION FORM

In order to make future sessions more effective and responsive to your needs, please take a few minutes to fill out the following evaluation.

The structure and the flow of this session was logical and well-designed.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree (Worst)				Strongly Agree (Best)

Activities and worksheets were relevant to the topic.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree (Worst)				Strongly Agree (Best)

I gained useful knowledge that I can use immediately.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree (Worst)				Strongly Agree (Best)

I will watch, read, or listen to media differently because of this session.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree (Worst)				Strongly Agree (Best)

What was your favorite part of this session?

What are you aware of now that you were not aware of before today's session?

What action do you see yourself taking as a result of this program?

What could have been included that would have made this session more relevant to you?

What was your overall opinion of today's session? (circle one)

EXCELLENT GOOD FAIR POOR

VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A 90-MINUTE OVERVIEW
OR
"TOWN HALL" PRESENTATION

The following pages contain an outline and handout masters for a 90-minute adult introduction to the issue of violence in the media. Seven video segments for the session will be found on Video A.

The outline is not a word-for-word script but rather a presentation of key concepts to establish a common base of knowledge among citizens, parents and community leaders so that our on-going "public conversation" about these issues will be more informed and effective. The session can also be used as in-service preparation for teachers or leaders planning to introduce the *Beyond Blame* program in educational settings.

Depending on the size and composition of the group, and the amount of time available, you may wish to introduce a more interactive style, including discussion at key points or other participant involvement. Suggestions for interactive elements are marked "optional" throughout the outline.

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

REPRINT PERMISSION GUIDELINES

Unlimited permission is hereby granted to the purchasers of *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* to photocopy the Handout Masters in this *Introduction/Overview Guide* only for educational use as recommended in the outline. Masters may not be altered and the Cover Page plus all masters must be copied as a unit. (Handout #5, *Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home* may be copied in Spanish or English or both and may also be copied singularly in unlimited quantities as noted at the bottom of its page). Copyright must be clearly visible and to ensure quality, all copies should be made from the original Guide.

Permission is also given to local institutions such as schools, churches or community organizations that have purchased the *Beyond Blame* program, to copy the session outline (pp. 25-33) so that each member of a presentation team or each teacher or leader using the kit may prepare her/his own individualized presentation notes. This permission does not extend to centralized libraries or resource centers serving many local institutions. (Additional copies of Leader's Guides are also available for purchase by local organizations that have purchased the complete *Beyond Blame* program.)

Audio and video tapes in the program may not be duplicated.

Copies of the outline or the Handout Masters may not be sold or reprinted for publication in any other form without prior permission from the Center for Media Literacy. Such requests must be detailed and sent in writing to the Center at 1962 S. Shenandoah St., Los Angeles, CA 90034 or faxed to: 310-559-9396. Please allow 10 working days for processing of reprint requests.

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INTRODUCTION/ OVERVIEW

90-Minute Overview Session

What You Need to Know Before Leading the Overview Session

Goal: To move beyond blame on the media violence issue, we must engage millions of citizens in a vigorous "public conversation" about core issues. This presentation outlines what everyone should know about media violence along with initial strategies for action — at home, at school and in the community.

Objectives:

- To gain an overview of some of the key issues in this complex societal issue.
- To review what psychological research says about the impact of viewing violence.
- To learn the six myths of media violence and ways to challenge them.
- To receive practical tips for reducing media violence in our own homes and in society.

Leader Preparation:

- In this guide, read:
  Introductory Section, pages 3-11.
  "Television Violence and the Art of Asking the Wrong Question," pages 12-16.
- Make copies of the complete Handout Packet as noted below for each participant — pages 34 to 48. Make these available to participants as they enter the room or at the beginning of the program.
- Listen to the audiotape: *"Issues and Answers: A Conversation About Media Violence,"* noting words and phrases that you can integrate into your own presentation.
- Review Video A, noting where each segment is to be cued for this presentation. Rewind the tape to the opening titles.
- Select six people in advance to each prepare a two-minute explanation of one of the six myths of media violence using information from Handout #4, **Six Myths of Media Violence**, the background readings and the audiotape. Select people who can speak confidently in front of a group, as well as keep to a time limit! (See page 31 for other options to presenting the *Six Myths*.)

Materials Needed:

- Handout Packets for each participant containing:
  - **Cover Page**
  - Handout #1, **Circle of Blame** (two-sided with Handout #2)
  - Handout #2, **There is a Difference...**
  - Handout #3, **Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence** (two-sided)
  - Handout #4, **Six Myths of Media Violence** (two-sided)
  - Handout #5, **Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home - (English)**
  - Handout #5, **Siete consejos para ver TV en casa - (Spanish)**
  - Handout #6, **What Everyone Should Know About Media** (two-sided with Handout #7)
  - Handout #7, **Empowerment Spiral**
  - Handout #8, **How to Write to the Media/Media Addresses** (two-sided)
  - Handout #9, **Challenging the Media is Everyone's Responsibility** (two-sided)
- VCR and monitor. (If your group is large, make sure there are enough monitors for an effective presentation: generally 1 monitor for every 50 people).

Time Required: 90 minutes

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Introduction:

- Welcome the participants.
- Introduce any special guests: elected officials, sponsoring organizations, etc.

Identify goals of presentation:
(3 mins.)

Why are we here?

(Introduce your own reasons for bringing the group together, including any local angle or story that is pertinent. Or expand on the following overall goals of this program):

- Because we are concerned about the growing amount of violence in entertainment media; we care about our children and our society.
- To gain an overview of some of the key issues and major research findings in this complex societal issue.
- To explore possible ways our community can become more empowered with practical things we can do individually in our own homes and together in our community.
- To find out more about a community education program entitled, *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*. It consists of this presentation and four follow-up courses:
  - — Eight lesson plans for elementary students in grades 4-5,
  - — another eight lesson plans for middle school students — grades 6-8;
  - — seven sessions designed for teen or adult groups;
  - — a seven-session program for parents and caregivers of young children.

(Announce if your school or institution will be sponsoring or conducting any of these programs. Just mention it here and give the dates; you can provide registration or sign-up details later in the program.)

CONCEPT #1 **Media violence has been debated in society for over 40 years since the earliest days of television.**

- Let's begin with a short video that will review how the portrayal of violence has changed on television over 40 years. We'll also hear some of the many opinions that are shaping the current controversy today. You may agree with some and not agree with others but in a democracy like ours, it's important we hear various points of view before we decide how we might want things to change.

Video A #1:
(4 mins.)

Cue Video A #1. *(This four-minute video segment provides a brief history of TV violence and then cuts to quick soundbites of various opinions on the issue by Senator Paul Simon, (D - IL), Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children's Television, actor Michael Moriarity, former F.C.C. Commissioner Newton Minow and others.*

Handout #1:

Call attention to Handout #1, **Circle of Blame.**

- The result of this battle of words has been a "circle of blame" with everyone pointing fingers at everyone else: viewers blaming the writers; the writers blaming the producers; producers blaming program executives; program executives blaming the advertisers; and advertisers blaming the public for watching!

- What are the effects of the "circle of blame"?

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OPTIONAL: Have participants call out what they believe are the effects before summarizing the following in your own words.)

— nothing changes, — nobody really listens,
— complaints rise, — the problem only gets worse.

- We must move beyond blaming others or waiting for "somebody else" to do something about it. The truth is, we all share responsibility for the society we are creating and passing on to our children.

- Media violence is not isolated from the growing incidence of violence in our culture. If we are to reduce media violence we must also look at how we are allowing violence to thrive in society at large. Both societal violence and media violence need to be challenged if we are ever to achieve a more peaceful world and a more caring culture.

- We all know violence in media is *not the sole cause* of violence in society but there is irrefutable evidence — which we will look at throughout this session — that media violence contributes to creating and reinforcing the *myths and images, beliefs and attitudes* that support a culture of violence. We might say that media are a *messenger for violence as an acceptable part of life*. It need not be that way.

- Media violence is an important place to begin to reduce violence in society because:
  — media violence is an issue that almost everyone is concerned about, because children and young people are involved;
  — media violence is market-driven and therefore is responsive to public opinion;
  — changes in the portrayal of violence in the media can influence further changes in society.

CONCEPT #2 **When considering issues around media and violence, we must be clear what we are talking about.**

Handout #2: Introduce Handout #2, **There is a Difference . . .**

- We must make some fundamental clarifications between the specific term: *TV violence* and the broader term: *media violence* which includes not only network and cable TV but also violence as portrayed in movies, videos, video and arcade games, computer programs, music and advertising.

- For example, there is a difference between violence…
  …on TV programs that broadcast over airwaves licensed to serve the public,
  …on cable channels which are optional and require payment of subscription fees.

- There is a difference between violence in media used for entertainment and violence that may be reported by the news or in documentaries (for example,wars or historical events such as the Holocaust or the civil rights movement).

- Even in entertainment violence, there is a difference between violence that may be justified in terms of plot and character (as in great drama like *Hamlet*) and violence that is incorporated just to keep the action moving, to create emotional shock or to showcase special effects (what many people call "gratuitous" or excessive violence.)

- There is a difference between violence portrayed with consequences and violence that is portrayed as having no consequences or worse, as funny.

- Not all portrayals of violence are the same. If we want to reduce "media violence" we must be clear what we are talking about.

CONCEPT #3

There has been considerable debate about psychological research on media violence, but what does it really say?

- For years, the "circle of blame" has been fueled by one question: Does media violence incite violence in real life? Does a child become more violent after watching violence?

- The answer is both yes and no.

- No, *not everyone* who sees violence on TV or in movies is going to turn into an axe murderer! But we don't all have to become killers for there to be significant effect in our lives and in society.

- In 1993, the American Psychological Association published a landmark report that identified not just one, but *four effects of viewing media violence*, especially in the early formative years of childhood.

Video A #2:
(:30 still)

Cue Video A #2, **Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence** *(30-second still graphic — read each one aloud as it appears on the video.)*

Handout #3:

Call attention to Handout #3, **Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence**. (Mention that all those who attend the ongoing *Beyond Blame* sessions or classes will have the opportunity to learn more about these four effects. There are even exercises in the elementary lessons that help children understand them. There is only time in this session to quickly summarize them.)

1. Increased aggressiveness and anti-social behavior.

- This does not mean, of course, that everyone who watches media violence will become a convicted criminal. But as you'll see in the following video report, Dr. Leonard Eron of the University of Michigan does find that watching violent TV in childhood can set up *patterns of negative behavior* that last into adult life.

Video A #3:
(4 mins.)

Cue Video A #3, **Summary of TV Violence Statistics and Research Findings**. *(This four-minute video segment, excerpted from A&E's "'Prime Time Violence,' Investigative Report," interviews Dr. Eron about the long-term impact of children watching TV violence).*

OPTIONAL: Invite response from the group about Dr. Eron's research findings. Or have participants share briefly with the person seated next to them.
- Is there anything in this report that surprised you?
- What one idea in the report will you remember to share with someone else?

- Dr. Eron's research helps us make some important connections about viewing violence at an early age — and what happens 20 years later when the child becomes an adult.

- But even we adults can be influenced by viewing violence. And this doesn't mean that we become violent criminals. We're influenced in a variety of ways by the images of murder and mayhem that we see on the news, in movies and in action dramas.

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- The APA report says clearly:

  "Even those who do not themselves increase their violent behaviors are significantly affected by their viewing of violence."

Video A #4:
(1 min.)

Cue Video A #4, **Cellular Phone Commercial**. What does this short commercial tell us about our lives and the world we live in today? *(In the commercial, a woman's car breaks down on a darkened highway. Will someone stop to help her? Will someone stop and hurt her? Note the images of fear and the appeal of fear. Pay attention to the music and sound effects. How long is it into the commercial before we realize that it is a commercial?)*

(Use the powerful images of this cellular telephone commercial to review the other three effects and how viewing violence has influenced our quality of life — individually and as a society. Pose the questions as ideas for participants to think about.)

2. ***Increased fear of becoming a victim.***
   - — Psychologists call this the "mean world" syndrome.
   - — Do we buy extra locks for doors and bars for our windows?
   - — Do we vote for more prisons and police?
   - — Do we stay home because we're afraid to go out at night, even though statistics indicate that most crime is down per capita?
   - — Are we victims of the *fear of violence*?

3. ***Increased desensitization to violence and victims of violence.***
   - — Are we afraid to stop and help someone in need?
   - — Are we afraid of asking for help ourselves?
   - — Is there a danger of our society losing the "Good Samaritan" ethic so fundamental to a caring society?

4. ***Increased appetite for more violence in entertainment and real life.***
   - — Do we tolerate more and more violence in entertainment?
   - — Have we come to expect a certain level of violence in entertainment?
   - — Did we fall for the fear tactics used in the commercial?
   - — Are our children (or grandchildren) bored unless there is heavy action in a movie or TV show?

CONCEPT #4:

Since the dawn of human history, people have learned who they were and how to behave from the stories of their culture. Today, TV is our society's primary storyteller.

- What kinds of stories is television telling us and especially our children?

- Professor George Gerbner, Ph.D. of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania is one of the foremost communications researchers in the United States. He has spent 30 years studying the impact of television on our society and has some very interesting thoughts on how and why violence in the media has become such an issue for us today. Let's hear what Dr. Gerbner has to say in this excerpt from a video entitled "The Killing Screens."

Video A #5:
(7 mins.)

Cue Video A #5, **Interview with Dr. George Gerbner**. *In this exerpt from* The Killing Screens, *Professor George Gerbner discusses and illustrates:*
- — how TV is today's storyteller;
- — how a cast of characters determines the stories told;

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— that men outnumber women 3 : 1 on TV;
— why stories of/by/for males are usually stories of power and conflict;
— why violence "travels well" around the world;
— the unprecedented amount of violent imagery today — "we are awash in blood."

OPTIONAL: Invite responses from participants about Dr. Gerbner's comments. Or have them share briefly with the person seated next to them.

- What one idea will you remember from this videotape excerpt?
- What is new information you may have never thought about before?

- What Dr. Gerbner has done in this interview is help us reframe the violence controversy from "Does an individual become violent from watching violence?" to "What is the long term-impact of repeated viewing of violent images on the culture in which we all must live and in which our children are raised?" This is an important insight that is changing the terms of the debate about media violence in the 1990s.

- It also provides us with new opportunities for action that can create long-term change on this issue.

CONCEPT #5: What we can do.

- To move this issue forward we must first decide to move *beyond blame*. We must stop waiting for somebody else to do something and start doing what each of us can do
  — individually and in our own homes.
  — collectively in our community.

- Just like the environmental movement counts on millions of people, including children, to do their part to help save the planet:
  — Most people do simple things like recycle newspapers or avoid using styrofoam.
  — Others get more involved by joining organizations, writing letters, planting trees, marching on "Earth Day."
  — A very few do complex things like build a windmill or lead a community effort to clean up a toxic waste dump.

But everybody does something! And when everybody believes that what they are doing will make a difference, it does!

- We need to build a movement in which millions of people participate — all trying to become more informed about the issues and doing what they can to reduce media violence in their own lives and to spread the word to other people.

- Such efforts begin to add up and to create public opinion and public "consciousness" that is very powerful.

- One of the most important steps is doing what we're doing today: learning more about the issues involved so we can discuss the topic with our family or friends without going round and round in the "circle of blame."

CONCEPT #6: We may find that many people we talk to about reducing media violence will bring up what sound like good reasons for not being concerned.

- We call these the *myths of media violence*. On the surface, they sound logical but if we look at them more closely, we can see that they really are just excuses for

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avoiding responsibility or for blaming someone else. Let's take a quick look at six of them and figure out how to answer them so we can move forward.

Video A #6:
(:30 still)

Cue Video A #6, **Six Myths of Media Violence** *(30-second still graphic.)*

1. I saw plenty of violence on TV when I was a child and I turned out ok.
2. Media violence simply reflects what's going on in real life.
3. Violence is a natural part of all human drama.
4. Decisions about viewing violence should be up to parents.
5. We live in a country that constitutionally protects free speech. Personally, I don't like violence in the media but I don't want censorship either.
6. If people don't want to see violence, they can turn it off or not go see it.

(Invite the six pre-selected presenters to share their short explanation of one of the myths. *Watch the timing! Your presentation can lose momentum if the presenters drag on.*)

Handout #4:

- In conclusion call attention to Handout #4, **The Six Myths of Media Violence**. Take it home and keep it handy!

  OPTIONAL: If you are presenting this Session in an informal setting where you have more than 90 minutes, you might choose one of the following optional presentations for the Six Myths of Media Violence:
  - Select a group of talented people to prepare in advance a short skit demonstrating each myth and how to answer it. See Session 6 of the Parent/Caregiver Leader's Guide for some possible scenarios.
  - Divide the group into small working groups of four or five and assign each group a myth to discuss and develop recommendations how to answer. You could have several groups working on each of the myths. Reconvene into the large group and review each of the six myths, inviting groups to quickly share their recommendations.

CONCEPT #7: There are three "fronts" on which we can organize to reduce media violence.

1. HOME:

In our homes...
We must manage our children's media and monitor the media coming into our homes. Not to do so is to leave our children without guidance in a crucial part of their lives. Here's another commercial but this time the punch line is a message we all need to hear.

Video A #7:
(:30)

Cue Video A #7, **Shaggy Dog Commercial.** *(A lovable shaggy dog "leaves home" because its young owner watches too much TV.)*

- Psychologists and pediatricians say that most children watch too much television. Reducing the amount of television they watch will reduce the amount of violence they are likely to see. We don't have to get rid of all television. But we do need to help our children manage their TV time and to balance TV watching with other activities that are also important for a healthy childhood.

- "Learn to watch television sensibly" said the narrator. Here are tips to help you manage television in your home:

Handout #5:

- Call attention to Handout #5, **Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home.**

  OPTIONAL: Have seven people pre-selected to read each tip out loud.

2. SCHOOL: *(and other educational settings)*

In our schools (and other educational settings)...
We must introduce media literacy programs into schools and afterschool programs, religious settings and community youth groups. Parents, too, need the opportunity to learn skills to take home to their young children. Researchers indicate that the effects of viewing violence *can be mitigated* in all age groups by learning and applying critical thinking and media literacy skills.

- In this last video report we'll learn more about the new field of media literacy education and visit some Massachusetts classrooms where media literacy is in full swing.

Video A #8:

Cue Video A #8, **Media Literacy in Action.** *Dr. Renee Hobbs of the Harvard Institute on Media Literacy and teachers in Billerica, Massachusetts, demonstrate systemwide media literacy programs now underway. This report is an excerpt from* Tuning in to Media: Literacy for the Information Age, *a 30-minute video available from the Center for Media Literacy.)*

- Media literacy provides a framework for analyzing and evaluating the powerful words and sounds that create stories with violent images and themes. The *Beyond Blame* program for elementary, middle school and teens helps our children learn five basic ideas about the media.

Handout #6:

Call attention to Handout #6, **What Everyone Should Know About Media.** Review the following headings.

1. *All media are constructed.*
2. *Media use their own unique "languages."*
3. *All audiences try to "make sense" of what they see, hear or read.*
4. *Media have commercial interests.*
5. *Media have embedded values and points of view.*

- Media literacy classes and courses, such as those offered in the *Beyond Blame* program, help us to replace the "circle of blame" with the empowerment spiral.

Handout #7:

Call attention to Handout #7. **Empowerment Spiral.**

- The empowerment spiral describes a method for helping people learn to solve problems in four steps. Each step looks at a problem from a different point of view and causes us to ask key questions, for example:

awareness — "OH!, I never thought of that before."
analysis — " Well, HOW did that happen?
reflection — "SO, what should be done about it?
action — GO! Let's get organized!

- Action, *any* action, brings us around again to awareness but now we're at a new level and a new understanding of the original problem. After a few cycles, we begin an upward spiral and we feel more and more empowered to solve the problems we face. The result? We stop blaming others because we're involved and active in transforming our violent culture into a caring culture.

(Announce here your plans and schedule for conducting Beyond Blame *courses or classes as well as any other media literacy programs that are available to participants or to their children.)*

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3. COMMUNITY: ***In our community...***

We all need to be knowledgeable and active citizens in our contemporary media society. And we must engage in a vigorous "public conversation" about the proper role of mass media, especially entertainment media, in shaping our current and future cultural environment.

- The issue of media violence is not just about what images we and our children are subjected to. That's only the beginning. The larger questions are:

  — *What kind of culture do we want our children — and their children — to grow up in?*
  — *What attitudes, behaviors and relationships are our children seeing as "normal?"*
  — *What will our culture be like 20 years from now — in 2015? What must we do now — in the 1990s — to set us on the path to get where we want to be then?*
  — *How do we ensure a thriving democracy in a global media world?*
  — *Are mass media and entertainment industries just commercial enterprises? Or are they responsibile and account for what they create and put into public space and time?*

- There are no quick answers to these questions. But the issue of media violence provides an entry-point for public discussion and debate of these important and critical issues now and in the coming years.

- The great anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- As good citizens of our media society, we must become informed and express our point of view to policymakers, to the media industry, to advertisers and to one another in the public press. With knowledge, we become articulate. Those who participate in *Beyond Blame* courses and sessions will wrestle with many of these ideas — and more.

- In the meantime, here is a tipsheet to help us all get in the habit of writing letters both of praise and of criticism.

Handout #8:

- Call attention to Handout #8, **Eight Steps to Success: How to Write to the Media/ Media Addresses.**

- We can also become active in the movement for media literacy which has done so much to change our response to media violence.

Handout #9:

- Call attention to Handout #9, **Challenging the Media is Everyone's Responsibility.**

Closure:

- We have learned a great deal in a short amount of time! This opportunity to gather together should not be seen as the end but as the beginning of the work we must do together over the next months and years. What is important is not having all the answers but learning to ask the right questions!

(If time has been allotted, open the floor for discussion or questions.)

- Thank everyone for attending.
- Invite participation in any ongoing committees or task forces.
- Acknowledge special guests.
- Acknowledge those who made the event possible.

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Beyond Blame

Challenging Violence In the Media

A media literacy educational program for community action.

HANDOUT PACKET

Dear Participant,

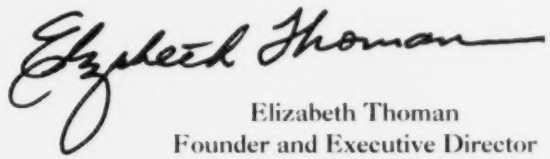
You are about to explore what you and your community can do to counteract violence in the media.

The vehicle for your exploration? A new multi-age program called *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media*, which is helping spark a national conversation about the increasingly violent imagery of movies, television, video, computer and arcade games — even recorded music.

The comprehensive materials in this packet and in the presentation you are attending were developed by a team of educators and violence prevention specialists who have incorporated key media literacy concepts. It's a creative new approach designed to provoke debate, challenge old myths and promote critical thinking about the relationship between violence in entertainment and the increased aggression we experience in our society.

For 40 years we have been engaged in a "circle of blame" about media violence, with writers blaming producers, producers blaming the company executives, the company executives blaming the advertisers and the advertisers blaming the public!

The Center for Media Literacy believes it's time to explore new initiatives. It's time to move from awareness to action, from passivity to engagement, from denial to acceptance of responsibility. It's time to move *Beyond Blame.*



Elizabeth Thoman
Founder and Executive Director
Center for Media Literacy

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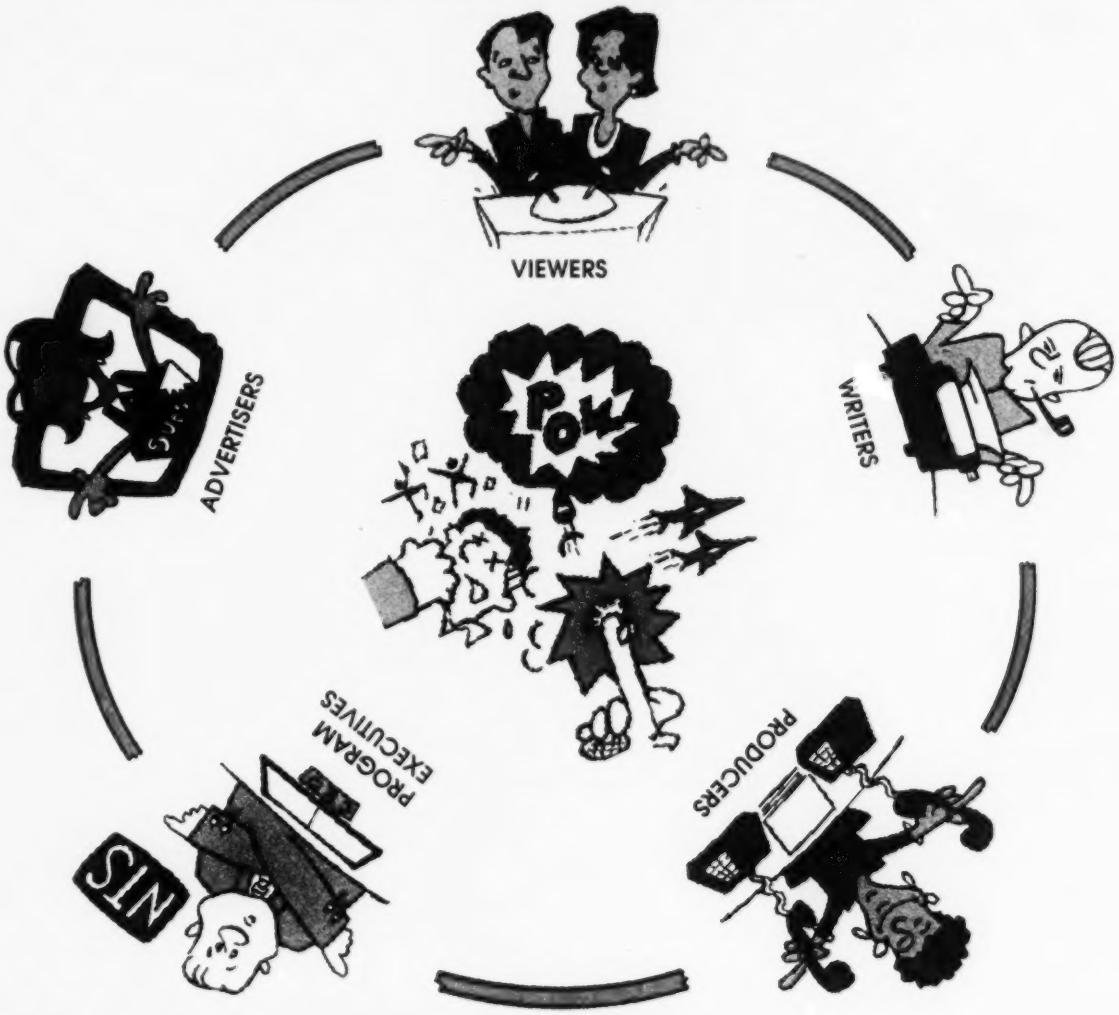
A HANDOUT #1

The Circle of Blame



No responsible person maintains that violence on TV is desirable for individuals or for society. How then, does it happen that the media continue to be filled with increasing amounts of violent imagery?

Through examining the "circle of blame," we can better understand how a complicated web of ratings and economics combine to create a system in which each party feels powerless because "somebody else" creates the problem:

- *Viewers blame those who write and create the shows;*
- *Writers/directors say the producers require violence in programs in order to get them financed;*
- *Producers blame program executives for demanding "action" in order to get ratings.*
- *Program executives say competition is brutal; and blame the advertisers for pulling out unless a show gets high ratings;*
- *Advertisers say it's all up to the viewers!*

It's time to stop the circle of blame and recognize we all share responsibility for the culture we are creating and passing on to our children.

Thanks to Mary Megee, producer of On Television: The Violence Factor *for the original idea of the "circle of blame."*

A **HANDOUT #2**

There is a Difference...

When considering issues around media and violence, we must be clear what we are talking about. Not all portrayals of violence are the same nor are they all problematic. Here are some important definitions and distinctions about media violence to keep in mind.

"TV violence"

Refers to violence in programs appearing on television networks, local stations or cable channels.

"Media violence"

Includes not only violence on television, but also in movies, videogames, music, videos, print and even advertising.

There is a difference between violence...

- on broadcast television stations using airwaves licensed to serve the public and available free;
- on cable channels which require voluntary payment of subscription fees;
- in videos or movies which are also voluntarily rented or tickets purchased at the box office.

There is a difference between violence...

- in entertainment
- in the news or in documentaries

There is a difference between violence...

- portrayed with real-life consequences
- portrayed without consequences and/or with humor

There is a difference between violence...

- that may be justified in terms of plot and character (as in great drama).
- that may not be justified because it is used primarily to grab viewer attention, create emotional shock or to showcase special effects. (Often referred to as "gratuitous" or excessive violence).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"Reduce Media Violence!"

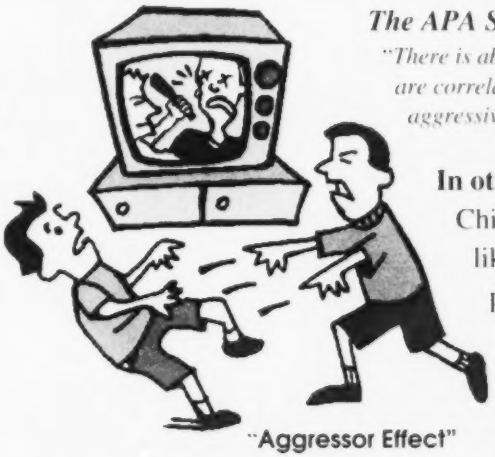
When we say we want to "reduce media violence," we are primarily talking about gratuitous violent imagery in entertainment media especially in media that is available to or developed for children.

A HANDOUT #3

Four Effects of Viewing Media Violence

Does viewing violence in media contribute to violence in real life? In August 1993, the Commission on Violence and Youth of the American Psychological Association issued a major new report titled: *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*. The report moved the debate on the effects of media and violence from just the impact *on individuals* to the cumulative impact of media violence *on our quality of life and on society as a whole* and identifies four serious and real-life effects resulting from repeated long-term violence in mass media.

1 Increased aggressiveness and anti-social behavior.



"Aggressor Effect"

The APA Study says...

"There is absolutely no doubt that higher levels of viewing violence on television are correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior."

In other words...

Children who watch a lot of violence in the media are more likely to imitate what they see (Ninja chops, sword and gun play, fist fights, etc.). Aggressive children who have trouble in school and in relating to peers tend to watch more television. The violence they see there reinforces their tendency toward aggressiveness and compounds their academic and social failures. If children do not have a strong support system to learn to handle anger and balance aggressiveness, they can establish lifelong patterns of aggression which may result in adult crime, cruelty to others (e.g., abuse) and overall mean-spiritedness.

2 Increased fear of becoming a victim.

The APA study says...

"Viewing violence increases fear of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviors and increased mistrust of others."

In other words...

Watching excessive amounts of media violence can make people think their communities are more dangerous than they really are. People who watch a lot of media violence tend to put bars on their windows, worry about locks and security systems and vote for more prisons and police. If we fear going out at night, we tend to stay home where we watch more TV violence, thus perpetuating the paranoia. This fear of the outside world is sometimes called the "Mean World Syndrome."

"Victim Effect"

3 Increased desensitization to violence and victims of violence.

The APA study says...

"Viewing violence increases desensitization to violence, resulting in a calloused attitude towards violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood to take action on behalf of the victim when violence occurs."

"Bystander Effect"

In other words...

Excessive exposure to media violence may produce a psychological blunting of normal emotional responses to violent events. It may also lead to a lack of responsiveness in real life to people who have been hurt or who are in trouble. A major question that arises from this effect is: are we in danger of losing one of the fundamental principles of human civilization — concern for our neighbor?

4 Increased appetite for more violence in entertainment and real life.

The APA Study says...

"Viewing violence increases viewers' appetites for becoming involved with violence or exposing themselves to violence."

In other words...

Viewers who watch violence grow in their ability to tolerate more and more violence as part of media entertainment. They also tend to expose themselves to dangerous and violent situations in real life, for example, carrying weapons or abusing drugs or alcohol. But all of us have come to expect a certain level of violence in storytelling and we don't feel satisfied unless we get it. Children beg us to take them to the latest action-adventure movies even if they are rated "R." When they go out to play, they imitate the violence they see in the media, turning it into a game — until somebody gets hurt.

"Appetite Effect"

Find out more about the four effects of viewing media violence.

For a copy of the American Psychological Association's recent report, *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*, write to: APA, Public Interest Directorate, 750 First St. NE, Washington, D.C., 20002-4242. Or call (202) 336-5500. Sample copies are free. Additional copies are $4.

A HANDOUT #4

The Six Myths of Media Violence

The following six myths are often given as reasons about why we can't do anything about challenging or reducing media violence. Like all myths, they seem to make sense at first. But a closer look reveals the simplistic reasoning behind each one that short-circuits serious debate and rationalizes doing nothing.

Myth #1 I saw lots of violence when I was a kid and I turned out OK.

Response: Psychologists tell us that even those who do not themselves become aggressive are still affected by viewing violence over many years. Some become so mistrustful of others they end up victims of the *fear of violence*. Others become so callous, they *turn their back* on a neighbor in need. In still others, viewing violence creates a craving for *more and more violence*, in both entertainment and real life.

Indeed, the more serious long-term effect of media violence may not be that some people become mass murderers, but that people gradually adopt patterns of bullying and meanness in everyday attitudes and actions.

For centuries people learned who they were and how they should behave through the stories they were told as children. Today, high-tech special effects make it possible to re-create violent imagery never before seen in human history. Children today are not growing up in the same world their parents did. The powerful images of mass media storytelling reinforce the myths, beliefs and attitudes of a *culture of violence*.

So, the issue is not just whether we as individuals turn out OK, but whether our *society* turns out OK.

Myth #2 Media violence simply reflects what's going on in real life.

Response: Media messages are much more than mirrors of society. In their very reflection and repetition they also reinforce, amplify and often distort. Research repeatedly shows that sensationalized news coverage of murders, rapes and disasters is far out of proportion to their frequency in real life. And more than ever before, the line between news and entertainment is increasingly blurred with "reality" shows that stage edited re-enactments of real situations, and "docu-dramas" only loosely based on real events.

While adults may be able to distinguish the real from the fictional, children often cannot. Frequent violence sends children a distorted message: that violent behavior is an easy and acceptable way to express anger and resolve conflict.

And the lessons are learned. The rate of arrests for serious crime by children under 15 increased *11,000 percent* between 1950 and 1980. It's still climbing today.

Myth #3 Violence is a natural part of drama. Some argue that watching violence can reduce anger and violent impulses in certain individuals.

Response: There is a vast difference between the bodies on the stage at the end of *Hamlet* and the human debris left after one of today's "superheroes" blows through a blockbuster movie or when video-game players spend a few hours "wasting" their opponents.

What is important for *catharsis* in drama is the resolution of human *conflict*. In great drama, violence occurs only to portray the rise and fall of a character who eventually recognizes and regrets her or his terrible acts.

In contrast, today's action-adventure entertainment makes violence an end unto itself. Those who use violence are not human beings who feel remorse; they're simply killing machines. Those who care for children should be deeply aware of the potential implications of exposing them to such violence and particularly concerned about characters portrayed as heroic simply *because* they are violent.

Myth #4 Decisions about viewing media violence should be up to parents.

Response: The stream of media images flowing continually into the average household can be overwhelming. So, parents today have a daunting task. Unlike parents of the past, they must develop and practice new parenting skills in order to help their children gain self-discipline in the use of the media and learn to critically evaluate the media messages that bombard them daily.

But parents also have a right to expect society to support their child-rearing efforts with public policies that reduce risks to children. Teddy bears and children's pajamas are subjected to more safety standards than are the TV shows that entertain our children for hours each day. An African proverb states: "It takes a whole village to raise a child." We are all responsible for the cultural environment in which today's children are growing up. That includes the mediamakers and media owners who control what goes out over the public airwaves or floods our cultural landscape in the images of pop culture. They must behave responsibly as good corporate citizens. And they need to be steadfastly challenged when they do not.

Myth #5 We live in a country that constitutionally protects free speech. Personally, I don't like violence in the media but I don't want censorship either.

Response: Of course, the First Amendment must be preserved and protected. However, there is clear legal precedent that when the safety of the public is involved, discretion is required. What is to be done when one person's free speech endangers another's personal safety? There is good reason why we can't falsely yell "fire" in a crowded theatre.

This issue of censorship boils down to whether portrayals of violence in media create a danger for the public. Researchers and psychologists say there *is* evidence of harm from the cumulative viewing of violence, especially for children. Others reject these studies as unproved. The result is an endless debate that's been going on for over 40 years. Perpetuating it only serves to silence public conversation about larger issues: in what kind of "cultural environment" do we want our children to grow up? What is the role of art and media and entertainment in imaging that future?

Over the past decades, media images have changed to reflect what the public considers acceptable or not in the realm of art. Long gone, for example, are *Amos n Andy* stereotypes of African Americans, as well as many negative images of women. Depictions of smoking, alcohol and drug use are now closely scrutinized. Gruesome and gratuitous violence can easily be added to the list of creative elements mediamakers carefully evaluate. Censorship will no longer be a concern when public opinion makes exploitative violence unacceptable as entertainment.

That, too, is the American way.

Myth #6 Violence is what people want to see. If some people don't want to see it they can turn off the TV or not spend their money on violent videos, games or movies.

Response: A check of the ratings for almost any week of television reveals that over the decades, comedies such as *Cheers*, *The Bill Cosby Show*, or *Home Improvement* regularly command the biggest audiences. But unlike other media use, television viewing is a ritual in people's lives, replacing reading or visiting with friends as a way to fill up leisure time. It is said that most people watch "by the clock" rather than by the program. TV is there at birth and stays on, in the average household, over 7 hours a day throughout life. Violence, as the staple element in formula dramas and movies, coasts along on viewer inertia rather than outright choice.

In terms of movies, videos and games that have to be purchased, it is naive to suggest that a profit-driven media marketplace merely reflects what people want. By its nature the marketplace also creates demand for products, often for things we never thought we "needed."

Violence in entertainment (including sports) is used as a marketing strategy by multinational media corporations whose products must "travel" across many languages and cultures. The primary audience is adult males 18-49 who are most likely to have the money to spend at the box office or on the advertised products that support violent programs on television. Despite objections by many women and by child advocates, murder and mayhem have become staples of entertainment media because they attract and appeal to this demographic age group.

Violence — both in media and in real life — may not be America's finest export, but it's our most visible one. Reversing the demand both at home and abroad may be one of the great challenges for the 21st century.

A HANDOUT #5

Seven Tips for TV Viewing in the Home

1 **Decide how much TV your family will watch.**
Set limits on the number of hours you and your family will watch each week and stick to it!

2 **Plan your TV viewing.**
Encourage a family attitude that television should be turned on only to watch a specific show, not just to "see what's on." Choose your shows ahead of time, using a weekly television program guide.

3 **Develop family guidelines for selecting programs.**
Be sure to discuss values you believe are important and the reasons for your choices. Check channel listings, including cable, and note reviews of programs with themes and subjects that match your family guidelines. Look for shows and videos that offer different viewpoints and help in your child's education.

4 **Make TV watching an interactive family event.**
Television doesn't have to end family discussion and interaction. Watch it together, and use every opportunity to talk about what you are seeing and hearing. Use storylines or characters to stimulate conversation on topics that can be difficult to discuss: family relationships, feelings, appropriate sexual behavior, divorce or death. Try "thinking out loud" as a non-threatening way to let your children hear your values and prompt their response.

5 **Talk back to your TV.**
When appropriate, express your opinions by "talking" directly to the TV as you watch. Respond to sexism, racism and unnecessary violence, but point out positive portrayals as well. Don't forget to challenge commercials and the way they try to sell us not only products, but attitudes and lifestyles.

6 **Let TV expand and enlarge your world.**
Find related books and magazine articles at your public library, and go on family outings based on ideas you've seen on TV. Keep an atlas or globe next to your television and find places mentioned in the news.

7 **Be positive about TV's contribution to our world.**
Television is the dominant force in our media culture and an important part of children's lives. It should be evaluated fairly, not denigrated.

The Center for Media Literacy is creating a broader view of literacy by helping people understand, analyze, and evaluate the media. The Center believes media literacy education is the sensible alternative to censorship.

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A HANDOUT #5

Siete consejos para ver TV en casa

1 **Decida por cuánto tiempo verá la TV su familia.**
Fije un límite al número de horas semanales que su familia verá la TV y hágalo cumplir.

2 **Prepare un plan para ver la TV.**
Promueva una actitud en la familia de que la televisión se debe encender solamente para ver un programa específico, no para "ver qué hay." Escoja sus programas por adelantado, usando una guía semanal de programas.

3 **Establezca pautas para escoger programas.**
Asegúrese de conversar sobre los valores que usted considera importantes y las razones para su selección. Revise las listas de programas, incluyendo los de cable, y tome nota de comentarios sobre programas con temas y materias que se ajusten a estas pautas familiares. Busque programas y videos que ofrezcan puntos de vista diferentes y que ayuden a la educación de sus hijos.

4 **Haga del ver la televisión un evento de participación familiar.**
La televisión no tiene que acabar con la conversación y la interacción entre la familia. Véanla juntos, y utilice cada oportunidad para hablar sobre lo que ven y escuchan. Use los diálogos o los personajes para estimular la conversación sobre temas que pueden ser difíciles de tratar: las relaciones interfamiliares, los sentimientos, la conducta sexual apropiada, el divorcio o la muerte. Pruebe el "pensar en voz alta" como una forma no intimidante de dejar que sus hijos escuchen sus valores morales y solicite sus respuestas.

5 **Dialogue con su televisor.**
Cuando sea apropiado, exprese sus opiniones hablándole directamente al televisor mientras lo ve. Responda al sexismo, racismo y la violencia innecesaria, pero también señale las representaciones positivas. No se olvide de contradecir los anuncios comerciales y la forma en que tratan de vendernos no solamente productos, sino actitudes y estilos de vida.

6 **Permita que la TV amplíe su horizonte.**
Busque libros y artículos de revistas en la biblioteca pública que estén relacionados con ideas recibidas de la TV y organice excursiones con su familia aplicando esas ideas. Mantenga un atlas o mapamundi cerca de su televisor y busque los lugares mencionados en las noticias.

7 **Sea positivo sobre la contribución de la TV a nuestro mundo.**
La televisión es la fuerza dominante en nuestra cultura de medios de comunicación, y una parte importante en la vida de los niños. Se la debe evaluar con justicia, no denigrarla.

El Centro para Alfabetización en los Medios de Comunicación está creando una visión más amplia de la alfabetización al ayudar al público a comprender cómo analizar y evaluar dichos medios. El Centro cree que la educación alfabetizadora de los medios es la alternativa sensata a la censura.

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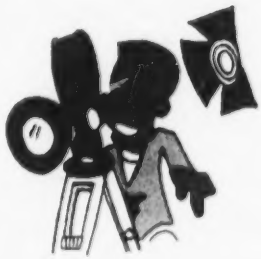
A HANDOUT #6

What Everyone Should Know About Media

• Five Core Concepts of Media Literacy •

1. All media are constructions.

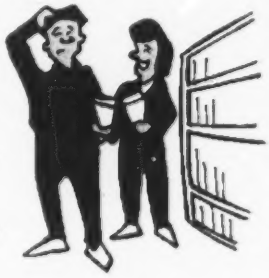


Media are carefully manufactured cultural products. They create an emotional experience that *looks* like reality, but of course is not — because it is all made up by one person — or many people — who select this picture and edit out those words or include this scene while another 20 versions land on the cutting room floor. Media are not "real" but they affect people in real ways because we take and make meaning for ourselves out of what we see, hear and read.

2. Media use unique "languages."

Media language is unique to each form of communication -- whether newspapers, TV game shows or horror movies. The language works because it is used over and over as a shorthand for conveying intended meanings: scary music heightens fear, camera angles convey relationships, headlines signal significance. Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor system of media language heightens our appreciation and enjoyment of media experiences, as well as helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation. The best way to understand how media is put together is to do just that. Media *production* and media *analysis* are the two sides of the media literacy coin.

3. Audiences "negotiate meaning."



No two people see the same movie or hear the same song on the radio; even parents and children do not see the same TV! Skillful readers and viewers examine different stylistic features of a media product and pay careful attention to the context in which the message occurs. This concept turns the tables on the idea of TV viewers as just passive "couch potatoes." We may not be conscious of it but we are constantly trying to "make sense" of what we see, hear or read. The fundamental skills of media literacy allow us to be *conscious* and *deliberate* about what we experience and, more important, how we interpret media experiences in our lives.

4. Media have commercial interests.

Media are ad-driven businesses. Newspapers lay out ads on their pages first. The space remaining is devoted to news. Likewise, TV programs don't exist simply to entertain us. They are there to ensure that a certain number of viewers will be watching when a commercial comes on. Corporate sponsors pay TV stations based on the number of people they expect to be watching. Advertisers want specific kinds of viewers (for example, children) who have the ability to spend their money on the advertisers' products (toys). TV programs are designed so that the right people will watch when the commercials come on. Maybe it's not the way it ought to be — but, in truth, most media are provided to us, as researcher George Gerbner says, by private corporations with something to *sell* rather than by the family, church or school with something to *tell*.

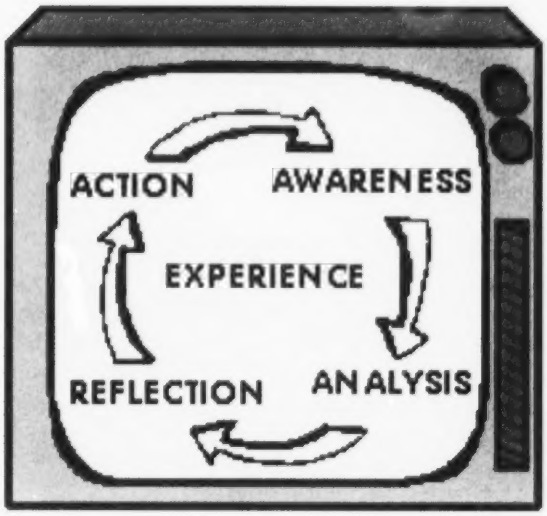
5. Media have embedded values and points of view.

Media, by their very nature *being* constructed, carry a subtext of who and what is important — at least to the person or persons doing the constructing. There are no value-free media and never will be. This presents a challenge for all of us to learn to "read" the media critically in order to uncover the value messages that are embedded in them. Only then can we judge whether to accept or reject these messages as we negotiate our way each day through our mediated environment.

FOR A FREE CATALOG OF MEDIA LITERACY TEACHING RESOURCES, CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-226-9494

A HANDOUT #7

Empowerment Spiral



The overall goal of *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* is to break the circle of blame about violence in the media by engaging millions of people in an empowerment process that leads from awareness to action on key issues in the media violence debate.

This approach, developed by the Center for Media Literacy, is based upon the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire. Although the process evolves in a continuing spiral of learning, we can identify four key steps: *Awareness*, *Analysis*, *Reflection* and *Action*.

Awareness

First, discover and articulate your own experiences and insights about violence in the media. This encourages you to think about your daily interactions with media that you may never have stopped to think about.

Analysis

Second, question the political, economic, social or cultural causes that make the media the way they are. This step is especially crucial in the issue of media violence because of the many interrelated aspects of the problem: the economics of the media industry, First Amendment concerns, the cultural breakdown of many family systems, etc. Without a clear grasp of how things got to be the way they are, we can't plan effective action for making changes for the future.

Reflection

Third, move beyond *the way media are* to *how we want them to be*. This requires considering media within the context of the philosophical tenets, ethical values and democratic principles that we accept as guides for our lives, both individually and collectively.

Action

Finally, formulate constructive action ideas — ideas that will lead to personal changes in your own media choices and viewing habits, as well as working for change locally, nationally or globally. Every Action, of course, leads to new Awareness... and the spiral of learning continues.

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A HANDOUT #8

Eight Steps to Success: How To Write to the Media

Do you ever feel assaulted by the violence in a movie, video or TV show? Are you offended by the insensitive portrayal of minorities on a new dramatic series? Or were you impressed by a pilot program that you think would make a fantastic regular TV series? Well, the entertainment industry wants to hear from you.

Writing a letter or postcard is a great way to let the industry know what you think of their efforts. For every letter a producer or advertising agency receives, they assume there are at least 10,000 others who feel the same way, but didn't take the time to write. That's a lot of voices representing one letter.

What most people don't realize is that all media organizations have complex systems to read, file, computer-code, itemize and report on the letters they receive. Audience feedback represents the pulse of the public. *Remember, it's important to write to give praise for what you like, as well as criticism for what you object to.*

Here are some tips on writing effectively to the media:

1. Be clear and concise. Use specific examples of what you do or do not like. Describe the material and what you feel is good or bad about it. Avoid the "I-just-don't-like-it" response because this can be dismissed as a "creative difference."

2. Be civilized. Be firm in your criticism, but don't rant. Use good grammar and appropriate language: don't threaten or accuse. Otherwise, your letter might not be taken as seriously as it is intended.

3. If you're writing to complain, focus on how offensive material negatively affects your regard for the station, publication or product. The loss of a customer or audience member means lost money to the company to which you write. On the other hand, explaining how the positive material *increases your regard* indicates to the company that you may be "spreading the word" or taking more interest in its other products or programs.

4. Offer suggestions for changes to offensive material. It's easy to criticize, but harder to create. Giving examples of other options also removes the element of finger-pointing.

5. Send copies of your letter to the editor and the advertising director of a magazine; the producers, directors and executives of TV and radio programs; or the sponsors of broadcast programs. For letters about TV or radio, you may want to send a duplicate copy to the Federal Communications Commission. (In Canada, send to the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission.)

6. Get others to write, too. Encourage friends, family, community groups, etc., to send their own letters. However, avoid form letters or mass signature petitions. They carry less weight than personalized, individual letters.

7. Make sure to provide a legible name and return address. Unsigned letters look as though the author did not feel strongly enough about his/her position to be identified with it. If you're not sure of your opinion, the reader won't be either.

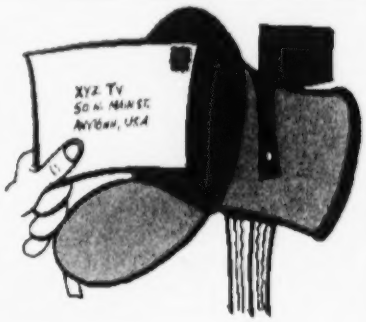
8. Always keep a few stamped postcards handy so you can jot down your thoughts right away.

On the other side of this handout is a list of addresses of the major media companies and organizations in the U.S. and Canada, but you may have to further research specific contacts. TV listings, such as *TV Guide*, often publish media addresses. Your public library can provide additional addresses of corporate advertisers and magazine publishers, as well as your local newspapers, television and radio stations. And don't forget elected officials!

What About Firing Off a FAX?

While more and more of us are using facsimile machines everyday, we don't recommend them yet for expressing your personal point of view to the media. Fax and phone numbers change frequently in media organizations. Your rate of delivery is best assured with a first-class stamp.

Where to Write to Express Your Views



BROADCAST NETWORKS

Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.
Mr. Robert Iger, Pres.
77 West 66th Street
New York, NY 10023

CBS Television
Mr. Howard Stringer, Pres.
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

NBC Television
Mr. Robert Wright, Pres.
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 19112

Fox Television Network
Mr. Mitchell Stern, Pres.
5746 Sunset Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90028

PBS (Public Broadcasting)
Mr. Erwin Duggan, Pres.
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

NEWS BUREAUS

ABC News
47 W. 66th St.
New York, NY 10023

CBS News
524 W. 57th St.
New York, NY 10019

NBC News
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

CNN (Cable News Network)
1 CNN Center
Atlanta, GA 30348-5466

MOVIE STUDIOS

MCA/Universal
100 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, CA 91608

Paramount Pictures
5555 Melrose Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90038

Sony Pictures Corp/ Tri-Star Pictures
10202 W. Washington Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90232

20th Century Fox
P.O. Box 900
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

The Walt Disney Co.
500 S. Buena Vista
Burbank, CA 91521

Warner Bros. Pictures
4000 Warner Blvd.
Burbank, CA 91522

CABLE TV SYSTEMS

TCI
Dr. John Malone
Terrace Tower II,
5619 DTC Parkway
Englewood, CO 80111

Time Warner Cable
Mr. Joseph J. Collins
300 First Stamford Place
Stamford, CT 06902

Cox Cable
Mr. James O. Robbins
1400 Lake Hearn Drive
Atlanta, GA 30319

Continental Cablevision
Mr. Amos B. Hostetter, Jr.
Pilot House
Lewis Wharf
Boston, MA 20006

CABLE TV CHANNELS

A&E
P.O. Box 1610
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

BET (Black Entertainment Television)
170 N. Moore St., Ste. 2200
Rosslyn, VA 22201

Discovery Channel/ Learning Channel
7700 Wisconsin Ave.
Bethesda, MD 20814-3522

The Family Channel
1000 Centerville Turnpike
Virginia Beach, VA 23463

HBO/Cinemax
1100 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036

Lifetime
3612 35th Avenue
Astoria, NY 11106

The Movie Channel/ Showtime
1633 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

MTV/Nickelodeon
1515 Broadway
New York, NY 10036

USA Network
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Faith and Values Channel
74 Trinity Place, 8th Fl.
New York, NY 10006

VIDEO-GAME MANUFACTURERS

Nintendo
Nintendo America
P.O. Box 957
Redmond, WA 98073

Sega/Genesis
Sega America, Inc.
P.O. Box 2167
San Francisco, CA 94080

NATIONAL MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

FCC - Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

NCTA - National Cable Television Association
1724 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

NAB - National Association of Broadcasters
1771 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

MPAA - Motion Picture Association of America
1600 Eye Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

American Advertising Federation
251 Post Street, Suite 302
San Francisco, CA 94108

IN CANADA

CRTC - Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission
Broadcast Coordination
Ottawa, ON K1A 0N2

Canadian Advertising Foundation
350 Bloor Street East, Ste. 402
Toronto, ON M4W 1H5

Canadian Association of Broadcasters
165 Sparks Street, 8th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1P 5S2

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
P.O. Box 8478
Ottawa, ON K1G 3J5

CTV Television Network
42 Charles Street East
Toronto, ON M4Y 1T5

A HANDOUT #9

Challenging the Media is Everyone's Responsibility

And the people who developed the action program entitled *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* want the excuses to end, the finger-pointing to cease. Instead, they want to introduce everyone to the skills of media literacy which can dramatically change our response to media violence.

They are the **Center for Media Literacy** and for over 17 years they have been developing innovative techniques for mitigating the influence and impact of violence in entertainment, as well as analyzing advertising, countering racism and sexism, recognizing bias in the news and exploring many other media issues.

You can support the critical work of this non-profit organization with a modest annual membership. It will bring you valuable publications and significant discounts on a wide range of media education materials for parents, teachers, religious and community leaders.

FILL OUT THE COUPON BELOW AND MAIL IT TODAY!
OR CALL TOLL-FREE: **1-800-226-9494.**

The Work of the Center for Media Literacy

- **Producing and distributing more media literacy materials than any other source in North America.**
- **Pioneering new methods for teaching critical thinking about media.**
- **Providing leadership training for educators, parent/teacher organizations, as well as religious and community groups.**

☑ YES, I'M COMMITTED TO CHALLENGING VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA.

Enroll me as an individual member of the **Center for Media Literacy** and send my first issue of the quarterly publication, *Connect,* immediately! I'll also receive a discount of 10% on any resources I purchase in the coming year.

Enclosed is my contribution* of ❑ $35 ❑ $50 ❑ $100 ❑ $250

❑ Send me information on how my school or non-profit organization can enroll as an Institutional member of the **Center for Media Literacy** and receive 20% off all media literacy teaching resources.

❑ Send me details on how my business or company can participate in the Center's gift certificate program for my local schools and receive a 20% discount on all materials as well.

❑ Send me the latest free catalog of media literacy resources.

❑ Check enclosed
❑ Charge to my credit card ❑ Visa ❑ MasterCard ❑ Discover

																Exp. Date:_____

**The Center for Media Literacy is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. All contributions above $35 are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

Name

Organization

Address

City

State/Zip

Area code/Telephone

In Canada: convert total and mail direct to 3250 Bloor St. W. #300, Etobicoke, Ontario, M8X 2Y4.

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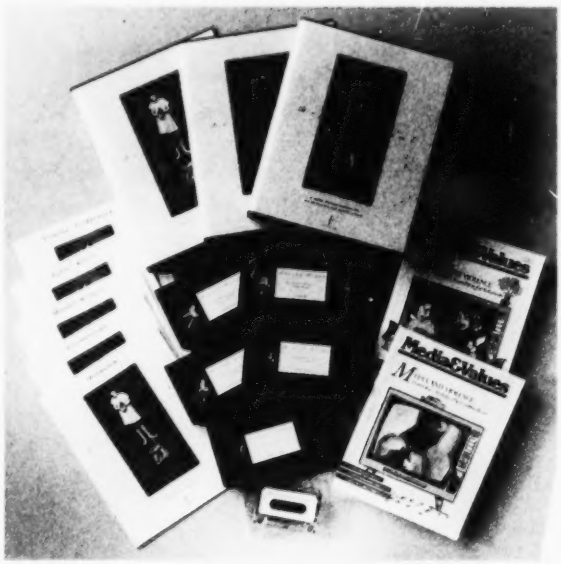
At last, an action program for changing
our response to media violence!

Beyond Blame

Challenging Violence in the Media



BEYOND BLAME is a new multi-age educational program for parents, young people, educators and community leaders.

BEYOND BLAME was developed by a team of media literacy educators and violence prevention specialists.

BEYOND BLAME is a video-based package perfect for:

- schools
- youth groups
- parent education
- religious institutions
- college and adult education programs
- community centers and service groups

"The approach is creative, the message compelling, the contents comprehensive."

– Bill Moyers

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CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY

As the nation's leading producer and distributor of media literacy materials, the Center is committed to creating a new view of literacy for the 21st Century — one that encourages critical thinking about the powerful images, words and sounds that comprise our mass media culture.

Using **Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media** ***and dozens of other resources created by the Center, people everywhere are taking control of the influence and impact television and media have on their personal lives and our culture.***

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CENTER FOR MEDIA LITERACY

Annual membership begins at $35 a year for individuals and $250 for schools, churches, community groups and businesses. It brings you:

A year's subscription to the Center's magazine-type quarterly.

•

Discounts on books, tipsheets, videos, Media Literacy Workshop Kits.™, and materials for media education. Also, discounts on gift certificates for your school, church or library.

•

Access to our Media Literacy HelpLine for information and assistance.

To become a member — or to receive the Center's new 16-page catalog of media literacy resources, call toll-free: **1-800-226-9494.**

YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT WILL HELP BRING
MEDIA LITERACY TRAINING
TO MILLIONS OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN.

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ISBN 1-879418-11-

Beyond Blame

CHALLENGING VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

A multi-media literacy program in five comprehensive units for community education and empowerment.

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1. INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW
- *How to organize effective programs in your schools and community.*
- *Background articles, bibliography and audiotape, "Issues and Answers."*
- *A 90-minute, video-based "Town Hall" presentation to introduce teachers, parents, religious and community groups to key concepts and strategies for action.*

2. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (*Grades 4-5*)
- *Eight lesson plans, 17 worksheets; eight video segments.*
- *Explores the missing consequences of media violence and challenges Hollywood's heroes and heroines. Kids discover how much violence they regularly see on TV and its impact.*

3. MIDDLE SCHOOL (*Grades 6-8*)
- *Eight lesson plans, 22 worksheets; eight video segments.*
- *Helps older kids create peaceful endings to stories; teaches about violent "jolts per minute" and inspires ways to make a difference.*

4. TEEN/ADULT
- *Seven session outlines, 11 handouts, five video segments.*
- *Explores deeper issues of violence in sports and the news as well as sexual violence in music videos and movies. Includes dozens of action and advocacy activities.*

5. PARENT/CAREGIVER
- *Seven session outlines, 21 handouts, four video segments.*
- *Taking the "Movie Ratings Quiz" is revealing; challenging the "Six Myths of Media Violence" is informative; learning the "Four Effects of Viewing Violence" is enlightening. An ideal curriculum for groups of parents, grandparents and caregivers of young children.*

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